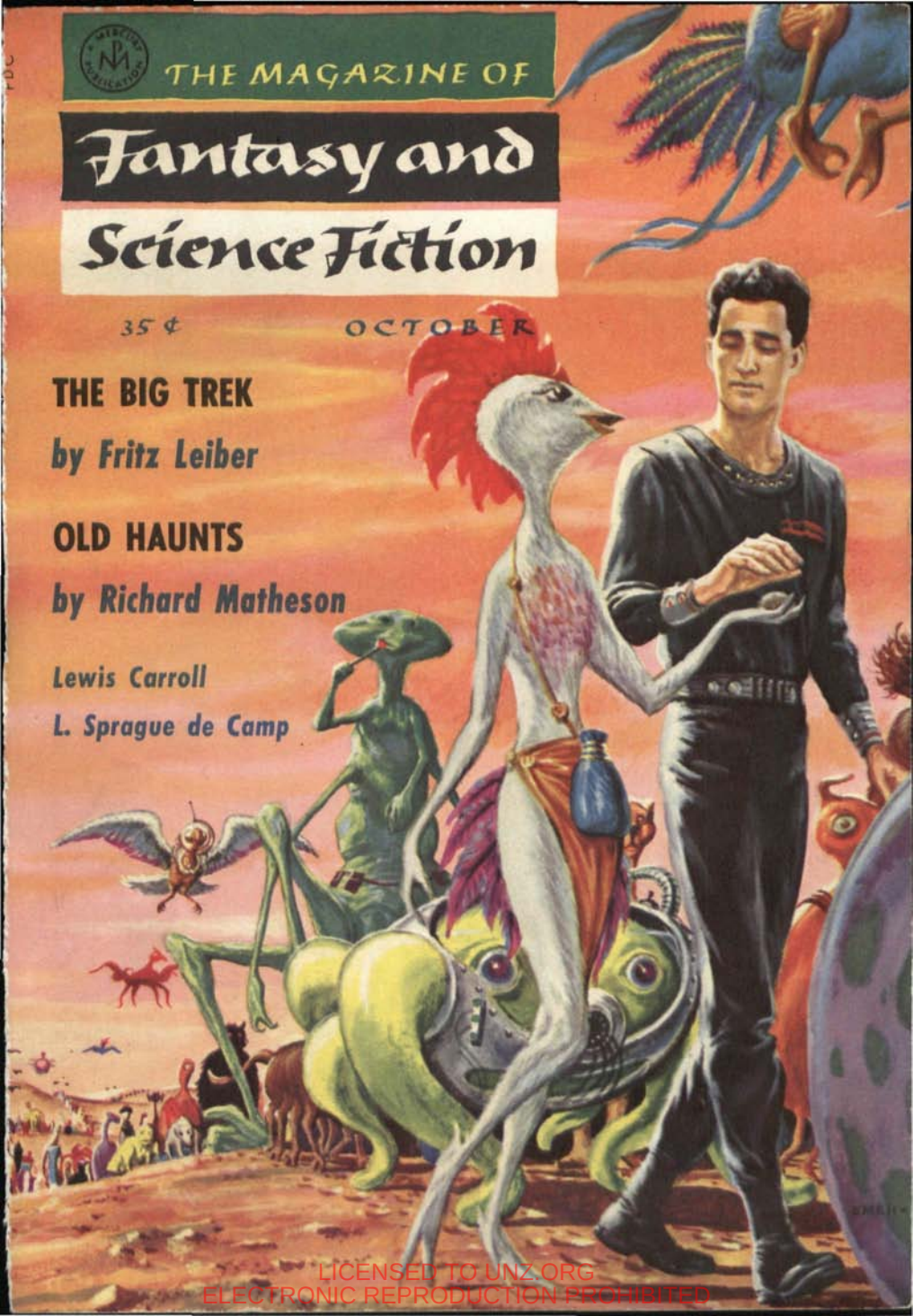

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 13, No. 4 OCTOBER

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Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Anthony Boucher*, EDITOR

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Not so many years ago, the readers of science fiction were unaccountably leary of female writers; and even so gifted an author as Catherine Lucile Moore was able to succeed only by hiding her sex behind her epicene initials. Now (and I think F&SF can take some of the credit for the change) many of the most popular writers in the field proudly bear such unabashedly feminine names as Mildred and Judith and Margaret and Katherine—and now Jane. Jane Roberts, who made her debut here last December with the widely liked The Red Wagon, *now shows, in her first long science fiction story, at least one reason why women are welcome in imaginative writing: No male would dare hint at so terrifying a secret of womankind, nor know enough to reveal so convincingly the covert existence of that secret in our present society and its vital overt role in the immediate future.*

The Chestnut Beads

by JANE ROBERTS

"TREMENDOUS! WELL, WASN'T IT?" Of course it was. Great! "We made it," she yelled, and threw a pillow across the room and began to dance, stark naked, on the bed. "Look at me, I'm Queen of the May," she shouted, and struck a dramatic pose, and draped a sheet around her. "Queen of the May," she yelled, defiantly, while panic hammered her white belly.

And Cynthia said, "Oh, my God, Olive, you're a card! For Heaven's sake, pull down the shades. You want all the town boys in here?"

"Sure, sure, bring them in. We'll have a ball," Olive giggled, desperately, and Cynthia bent over laughing.

"Oh, you're a scream, honestly," she shouted, bent over, her hands between her knees and her blond hair falling over her shoulders. "Hay, Win, come here! Get a load of this!"

Win came in from the bathroom, with her toothbrush still in her hand. "Miss Quinn, stop this

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clowning right now. And put your clothes on," she said, pulling a long face, mimicking the house mother. They started to laugh, with *oh's* and *ah's* and tears streaming down their faces.

"Hush, hush, I hear voices. I hear voices," Olive chanted, high, and the two other girls slammed her with pillows and pulled her down.

"Well, I was great, wasn't I? Wasn't I?" she demanded, breathless, planking down on the bed, and her thick, black hair tangled. "Oh, I was tremendous," she said, mocking. "I ought to be on the stage."

"Well, for God's sake, what's the matter with you now? You change moods faster than anyone I know." Cynthia found a comfortable chair with unfailing accuracy, and Win grinned.

"She's worried about the initiation," she said, and Olive frowned.

"You damned psychology majors. Think you know everything. Sure, sure, I'm scared of a bunch of stupid college girls that I see all year long. Ha! That's a laugh." She paced the shag-rug floor, with the panic behind her, singing like a thrown knife. "It's silly, anyway, initiations. Old world stuff. Practically prehistoric. A bunch of nuts."

Cynthia sat on the foot of the quilted bed, examining her smooth legs with critical concern. "I bet they'll wear masks, and turn us around and around, blindfolded, so we don't know where the devil we are."

Win grinned and Olive yelled, "Can't you two talk about anything else?"

"I know!" Win snapped plump, perfectly manicured fingers. "It's crystal clear."

Olive looked up. "What is?"

"You," Win said, and started counting on her fingers. "One: you're afraid of this sort of thing, secret societies and all; two: intellectually you realize that your fear is ridiculous; and three: you react with emotional defiance." She shrugged. "Oh well, you wouldn't admit it anyway. But you can look it up in my psych book if you don't believe me."

"For God's sake, forget your damned psychology. You psych majors are a bunch of nuts anyway." They were, Olive brooded, crazy as coots. "It's a lot of rubbish. Ridiculous!" she shouted, with the panic pushing her on. "School stuff. Anyway, I'm going to sleep." She curled up and turned her face to the wall, listening to the fear breathe, trying to smother it with sleep.

Their room was on the third floor of the dormitory, at the end of the hall by the bath. It had been furnished with three single steel-framed beds, three chairs and identical dressers, but the original spartan simplicity was lost somewhere in a maze of piled-up dresses,

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skirts, slips and mementoes. Innumerable glass bottles cluttered the home-made orange-crate dressing table, and a teddy bear sat in idiotic elegance on a pile of unironed clothes. Now and then the hall light clicked off and on, a signal for the high-pitched giggles that punctuated the night time stillness.

Once Olive heard Miranda Williams, and she sat up in bed, frowning. They weren't anything but a bunch of nasty children, absolutely nasty, she thought.

Miranda laughed again. There was something insidious about her chuckle. Some demon in it crept down inside your throat, compelling your muscles to laugh; forcing your mouth into a horrible grimace of laughter though inside, hidden sorrows of your own made you old. Olive's eyes flew open.

The chuckle reminded her of parades; the beating drums, the rhythm of stamping feet, the frantic faces, the screaming shriek of the children's voices. Whenever she heard a parade, even from far off, or turned a corner and saw the watchers, she always ran. Ever since she was a child. She could feel her personality dribble away. The rhythm and the beat were monsters, resenting her, making special effort to draw her in.

And revivals. One night she had passed a small store downtown. The door was open. A sign read, PUBLIC WELCOME, and she'd stood there, in a cool summer dress, with her long black hair warm on her neck. Scoffing, lifting her eyebrows, looking straight down the aisle to where the black-gowned preacher stood. His voice was soft, crafty as an animal. It padded down the aisle, furry, insistent, and his eyes were magnets. They possessed some part of her that she had lost, some infinitesimal, precious thing lost between a million seasons. It reached out to reclaim her. A longing turned her inside out with wanting. She had taken two steps, three steps, four steps toward him. Five steps seeking him out. The man beside her coughed. She reeled backwards, and there was nothing but the preacher, yelling, waving her onward, and all the people's faces, watching, licking their lips.

The panic swept in. She turned, stumbling for the door. Behind her the people wailed, beat their breasts, sobbed, as if she was a part of them and now forever lost. She ran with her footsteps pounding behind her on the night-dark sidewalk. Quicker, quicker, until their voices were less than small eddies of wind grasping at her ankles.

Sweat trickled on her upper lip. She caught it with her tongue, and it was fear, bittersweet. She sat up in the darkness, shaking off the memory, lighting a cigarette, whispering to herself. "It's all right, baby. College initiations aren't like that. Not at all. They're jokes, that's all. Like children playing

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games." She repeated the words over and over. Finally her eyes closed and the panic retreated into the nether world of skull.

Morning was normality, fighting to get in the john. (Win was there first and she always read.) Olive dressed while she waited. "You're real cute," she told her image in the mirror, and scoffed at her fears the night before. After all, she was being admitted to the best sorority on campus. That should make her happy, shouldn't it? "Of course it should," she said, aloud.

"What should what?" Cynthia poked her head out from the covers. "What time is it?"

"Late enough. You'll be late if you don't hurry," but Cynthia laughed and turned over. Olive combed her black hair carefully, slipped into a skirt and sweater, grabbed her toothbrush and waited outside the bathroom, in the hall. She was short, slender, with eager large gray eyes, merry-mouthed, and determined this morning to be gay from inside out.

"Hi! How do you feel?", asked Miranda Williams, sweeping down the hall. She stuck her smirky face forward and grinned. "Sure hope you feel fine now. You won't feel so hot tonight."

Olive looked up coolly. "I'm fine, thank you," she said. The panic throbbed in her throat. Funny? Well, wasn't it? she asked herself when Miranda was gone. Of course it was, funny as the dickens. She ran into the john to tell Win. "Imagine," she giggled. "Trying to frighten us as if we were children. Imagine! Why, I just laughed!" She paused for breath, "Well, I mean . . . it was just so silly."

"I bet you did," Win said.

"Did what?"

"Laughed." Win moved her athletic five-foot-six frame with seeming dignity into the hall. "You might be laughing now, but I bet you weren't then," she called over her shoulder, and Olive yelled, "Oh, you think you know everything."

The day was a kaleidoscope of forced gaiety. A fear tapped her on the shoulder, ached like a pain in the back of her bones. Finally she sat in Sophomore English, the last period for the day. Lounze discussed Beowulf as if it were the last thing in the world she was interested in, and the students listened with bored inattention, knitted and passed notes.

Olive sat staring out the window, her eyes narrowed, her legs crossed, and one foot waving restlessly back and forth. Her lips were small, nicely proportioned, but now they formed a straight line of vexation, and the planes of her face were hardset.

Across the room, Cynthia sat with her eyes half closed, chewing gum with solemn nonchalance.

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Her blond hair was cob-web soft, whispering coolly against her pink cheeks, and her full lips were parted in a studied pose of seduction. Win sat three rows down. She took notes with a quick, efficient hand. Her head was set in a determined effort of concentration, like a tilted egg, covered with fine brown fuzz.

Olive looked over at them briefly, feeling uneasy, as if someone were staring at her; as if her body were glass and a million eyes were peeking through. Nerves, she brooded, and looked up, guiltily, to meet Miss Lounze's clear stare. She blushed nicely in excuse for her inattention, then frowned. There was something in the teacher's look that had nothing to do with classes. There was . . . speculation? Only for a moment, then the stare went blank, and traveled vaguely away. Olive uncrossed her legs and attached her eyes self-consciously to the blackboard.

Lounze was tall and dark, with high cheekbones and an off-and-on personality, so that the students never knew where they stood. Today she was a shell of a person, vacant, with no light shining through her brown-orange eyes, and no sign of the wit and vitality that would return, suddenly, as from a trip.

Olive didn't like Lounze, avoided her whenever they met in the halls, and spoke as little as possible in her classes. An irrational impulse made her want to hide herself from the woman, scurry away quickly whenever she came near.

She gave parties, too, Lounze, small informal ones, and Olive smirked. Who but a bunch of dopes would give up a Friday night to go to a teacher's party? She smiled, because that was one thing she and her roommates had in common, leagues of men. Why, she bet that they had more men among them than all the rest of the sophomore class combined. And they weren't any dopes either, she thought, she or Cynthia or Win. You had to be an honor student to be admitted to that sorority. And there it was again. . . .

"It's just for effect," Win said later, "Having the initiation at midnight. They want to be sure we're in the proper mood."

Cynthia shook well-rounded shoulders. "Well, I am, that's for sure," then, to Olive, "Well, what the hell are you crossing yourself for? You're not a Catholic."

"I'm casting off evil spirits," Olive snapped, and they winked behind her back.

Cynthia polished her nails, turning them this way and that, examining them under the wall light. She sat there humming, and Olive yelled, "My God, you're not going to a wedding."

"Shut up." Cynthia grinned and arranged the bottles in a neat array. "Lord, this place is quiet," she said.

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"Too quiet." Olive shivered slightly. It was odd to be in their room this time of night, instead of on a date, or drinking coffee in The Hut, or studying in the library. Down the corridor a phone rang. The housemother answered it. "Yes, they're all in tonight," she said, and five minutes later they heard someone at the door.

"Whee. Guests!" Olive jumped for the door. "Come on in," she called, throwing it open, standing there foolishly because the hall was empty. "A joke! Trying to scare us. Oh, the fools! Isn't it a howl, well, isn't it?" The muscles jerked in her throat. Her fingers clenched and she giggled, "Craziest thing I ever heard."

Win found the note. "Listen to this."

"What does it say?" they yelled, following her into the room. Win set her face in disapproving lines. "*'Turn out your lights. Someone will enter your room within the hour. Don't move until they leave.*' Really," she said, agreeing with Olive for once. "Really, and college students."

"Oh, what a riot." Cynthia plopped down on the bed laughing. Olive grabbed a blanket and draped it over her shoulders, making her face solemn. "This is no jesting matter, it's a matter of the soul," she said, and giggled because it was such a farce.

They sat on the bed, listening. Was that a footstep, outside in the hall? Was the door opening? Or had they been staring at it so long that their eyes made it move? Was that a whisper? No, only voices drifting up from the campus below, only the housemother scrabbling pale papers in the dark hall desk, or a professor leaving his office, rattling the key in the lock, ready to walk down the quiet gravel paths.

But she had heard something. No, only her nerves. "Let's tell jokes," she whispered.

"Shush."

"Well, we may as well do *something.*"

"Quiet. Someone's coming."

"They are not. It's your imagination."

"Olive, *will* you shut up?"

A giggle. "We ought to hide behind the door and jump out. That would show them."

"Shut up."

"But it's silly." Silly to sit there, shaking, as the footsteps crossed the floor, soft on the shag rug. In the shadows you could almost see the hand linger on the dressing table, the footsteps across the rug again like leaves falling on pine needles. The door closed gently.

"C'mon, let's see what they did." The words banged against the quiet, but she just wasn't going to *sit* there. She sprang up, making her lips laugh, and turned on the light, dashing before them to the dresser.

"A knife, with ketchup on it.

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Ha! Oh, can you beat that?" They were beside her now, laughing. She licked the edge of the knife lightly. "Ketchup." Her lips were already forming the words when she dropped the knife. "It's not . . . not ketchup," she whispered, then, with a whoop: "Chicken blood. It must be chicken blood," she yelled, against the panic. "It's chicken blood, and I'm going to get . . . YOU!" she giggled, chasing Cynthia around the room.

"It's time to go," Win said. They stopped clowning and walked across the campus to the old science lab. Olive sauntered, swinging her arms. "Boy, we sure are silly, going to a thing like this," and when no one answered, "Well, aren't we?"

"Yeah," Win muttered, but without her psych major voice, and Cynthia forgot to wiggle her hips when she walked. The night was fur-soft, too warm for May, and they walked through interconnecting pools of silence, staring ahead to where the old building showed through the trees. A lone leaf fluttered disconsolately across the gravel path, and Olive yelled suddenly, "C'mon, I'll beat you to it, scaredy-cats." She gritted her teeth. Her footsteps pounded ahead of them in the darkness. When they caught up, she stood, white-faced and breathless. The panic screamed, high in her head. She held her stomach, panting, laughing in quick jerks. "C'mon—last one in is a rotten egg," she shouted, and threw open the door.

And afterward they did not remember, and were not meant to remember, until the day when with rage and lust and hate unutterable, they would sweep across the continents. The hooded figures, the candles, and the chants, these were all that they recalled, and Olive gasped, "It was so silly, nothing to be frightened of at all."

"What did I tell you? But you always want to make mountains out of molehills," Win said, in her psych major voice again, and Cynthia waved her arms dramatically, announcing that it was dawn. When they returned to their room, Olive sat at the dressing table, combing her hair, with her forehead puckered.

"Well, what's the matter with you *now?*" Cynthia demanded, and Olive muttered, "Nothing," feeling uneasy, as if there were something she should remember. She reached up to unbutton her blouse and her hands froze in mid-air. "Where did I get these? I don't remember getting them. . . . Where did I get these?" she yelled and jumped up, pulling a string of beads from around her neck. "Where the hell did I get them?" She ran over, thrusting the necklace out for them to see. It was brown, made entirely of chestnuts, and her hands shook as she held it out. "Do you have one, too?

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Did they give you one, too?" she screamed. "Damn it, answer me." Cynthia and Win both shook their heads.

"What did they give them to me for? I don't want their damned beads," she shouted, and threw them down, hard, on the bed.

She stood there, wild-eyed, staring, with the others suddenly quiet, and a terror that they could not understand making them turn their eyes away. As if she had handed them a problem that all three knew belonged to her alone; as if they were awaiting her solution.

"Well, what are you staring at me for? What do you want me to do, eat them? . . . I guess you just don't rate," she said finally, laughing hard now, with her face contorted, and her hands in fists again. "Ha! Isn't that funny? Well, isn't it?" But still they watched her, uneasy, knowing that there was something that she must do. She stared at them, choking, then reached over, picked up the necklace and placed it in her jewelry box. "Well, isn't it funny?" she demanded, pleading.

They grinned, with the tension and anxiety suddenly gone. "A riot, a positive riot," Cynthia agreed.

II

It was Winter and snowing. Miss Lounze stood at the kitchen window looking out at the street. Children darted in and out of the snow-shadows, marionettes jerked up and down by snow-silk strings. Behind her, in the living room, laughs rose and broke like balloons. She twisted her wrist, gently, listening to the jingle of the cold charm bracelet.

"Where are the glasses?"

"Glasses?" She was back in the kitchen now.

"For water."

It was a ridiculously high girl's voice. Lounze stood there a moment, not wanting to turn. "In the first cupboard." She waited, then walked into the living room, smiling, with the bracelet clinking gently, and her full skirt swaying as she moved.

The three girls burst in happily. Someone took their coats. The living room was crowded now with students and a sprinkling of professors. A phonograph on the floor played classical music, and a stack of records was piled neatly on the top of the drop-leaf table in the corner.

"Olive?"

Olive disentangled herself from the others, muttering, "Excuse me, excuse," and went out to where Lounze waited in the kitchen.

"Do you see that boy? The tall one with blond hair?"

"Yes." He was standing by himself, uncomfortable, holding a martini and glowering, as if he wished that he hadn't come.

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"He's from Columbia. Brilliant, really, but he doesn't know anyone here. Will you keep him happy for me? You will, won't you?" She took Olive's arm gently. "His name is Bill Watkins," she said, with the bracelet jingling, and an intimacy about her that bound them both in conspiratorial secrecy.

Olive smiled. "Sure," she said, and forgot immediately about another boy she had wanted to see. He was nice, Bill Watkins, but uneasy, laughing nervously at everything she said; watching her eyes and face, anticipating each move she made, as if *he* were trying to make *her* feel at home.

She escaped, finally, but only to look up and see Lounze. Suddenly, without knowing why, she made her way back across the room, smiling. He *was* handsome, she thought, and it *was* mean to leave him all alone.

"Isn't it funny," she said, later, to Win. "If Lounze hadn't pointed him out to me, I might never have known him at all." And somehow —they never really knew how it happened—Lounze's parties became a habit. They never exactly planned to go, but every Friday night about seven, or seven-thirty, one of them would begin to wonder, "What's going on at Lounze's tonight?" And before they knew it, they were washed, powdered, dressed, and on their way.

The long streets between her apartment and the college became as familiar as a child's backyard. On the few nights that they did venture off, they felt confused, vaguely frightened, as if they had wandered off into an alien neighborhood after dark. "I really don't know what we go there for," Cynthia said, and Olive laughed.

"Free drinks, free food, and men galore."

"We're a bunch of freeloaders," Win said, and they dropped it. But it was always there, reflected in the shining skull mirror behind each bright eye—the intimation that something was . . . wrong. It clung to their consciousness like a tiny hair in the eye.

And there was more. They would be sitting in their room, and the phone would ring down the hall. The housemother would send word. It was for Olive. She'd dash down quickly, and pick up the receiver. "Hello? Saturday night, to the dance? Yes, I'd love to go." The words would be on her tongue.

"Olive? Olive? Are you there?" the boy would ask.

Then, slowly, "Yes, yes, I'm here. Only, I can't go with you Saturday. I'm . . . busy. Sorry." She'd stand there, baffled. She *had* wanted to go. Why, why had she changed her mind? Then, quickly, before she really had time to wonder, an answer would spring, full-bloom. Of course, she'd think. I have to study, or I promised Bill,

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or any one of a million reasons. But later, oddly enough, she couldn't quite recall just what it was.

The calls came less frequently now. When she complained, Win would laugh. "All the men think you're going steady," and she'd yell, "Well, I'm not!" One day she ran down the stairs to the smoker. "I'm not going steady with that Bill Watkins. I'm playing the field," she announced, firmly, so that the word would get around.

It was a coincidence that she was always busy when someone else called. Of course it was. Only later, that Spring, did she begin to suspect that it was more. But then it didn't make any difference. He was a transfer student, John Leggin, and she noticed him at once. It was easy to take on an extra course, so she enrolled in Oil Painting because he was an art major. Before long, as she had planned, he began asking her for dates. She felt wondrously free that first night, defiant, as if she were breaking some inexorable command. Looking back, she always wondered why the evening had turned out so miserably.

For two weeks after that she sat in art class watching him, planning to stop him outside in the hall. A voice inside told her that it was her last chance to break through . . . whatever it was. But she didn't, and the day after, Bill Watkins came and brought flowers. He looked particularly handsome in a new gray suit, his head bowed attentively and his steady brown eyes smiling.

They did make a nice couple, she thought, in Lounze's kitchen, with the sounds of the party like leaves rustling. She had gone to the kitchen to be alone for a minute. The people in the other room were smiling and chatting, and the music rushed like waves against the shore of books, couches, knick-knacks and chairs. She turned, startled, as Lounze came in and closed the door.

Olive watched her as she came closer, smiling with her orange-brown eyes.

"What's the matter, Olive? It's not like you, wanting to be alone by yourself like this," she said, touching Olive on the arm now.

Olive sat down. "It's . . . smoky in there."

"Oh? I didn't notice."

Silence. Olive studied the stove and refrigerator, the cabinet and the sink. Then she looked up. "I feel better now. I guess I'll go back in." But she didn't move. Her hands were shaking and she wondered why.

"You've been awfully quiet tonight. And I've missed you lately," Lounze said, gently, with the bracelet tinkling.

"I . . . haven't felt too well. A cold, probably. This time of year, with it warm one day and cold the next. The kids in the dorm all

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have colds. Yes, I must have caught one there"—not looking up now, wishing she could stop the nervous avalanche of words.

"No, more than that, Olive. What is it?"

She had known that the question was coming. Somehow she didn't want to answer. The old feeling about Lounze came back—the wanting to run, out through the living room, and the hall, down the stairs, as fast as she could go. "Nothing, really," she said, with her voice cracking. Her pleading made Lounze's eyes turn all orange.

"Now then, of course something's wrong. What is it, Olive? Perhaps I can help." The words were summer-air-soft, cotton-gentle. She smiled and put out her hand.

And what was the use? Of anything? And why did she have to be so silly? Of *course* Lounze wanted to *help*. She'd never known anyone so kind. What made her suspect her? And of what? "Nothing, really," she repeated, trying to smile. But the tears were warm rain gushing down between the hollows of her cheeks now.

"There, there, Olive, you're tired. Cry it out and you'll feel better. You're tired, upset. That's all. It will pass." Lounze stood there with her hand on Olive's shoulder, waiting, smiling gently, while the refrigerator and the lights breathed quietly, like jungle beasts, squatting on their haunches in the corners of the room.

Later, Olive laughed and talked and was the life of the party. It was so silly, she thought, to let moods like that get her down. And then the explanation was so simple, really. Lounze had cleared it up in a minute. And she'd been so worried! And Bill *was* so wonderful. How odd, that she hadn't realized that he was the one she loved, and that was the reason she was so . . . uncomfortable with other men. The relief was warm bathwater, washing her anxiety away.

She felt better that night than she had in months. She hummed as she prepared for bed, and told Cynthia that Bill was going to propose soon. She could tell. There was a moment—no, only a half-moment's hesitation when he finally asked her; a sudden crumbling inside as if a piece of her had broken away. Then she was smiling, and saying "Yes," and then there was all the excitement of telling the others, and flashing the diamond, and watching the envy in the other girls' eyes.

The following month Cynthia met Ray Williams, Miranda's brother. In the summer they had a double wedding, with Win as maid of honor. Win never did get married. Not that she didn't have chances, because she did. Somehow she could never get herself to say yes,

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even the one time when she wanted desperately to say it. She grew to cherish her independence, and after all, she thought, she had never been overly fond of children.

To all intents and purposes, Olive was a contented wife, and later a good mother. If there was a desire for a deeper fulfillment, it was buried beneath a swirling social life, a variety of clubs and community work.

Only now and then did she feel a momentary panic, a sudden paralysis, as if she had surprised the mirror and found no image there. It happened, suddenly, when she was preparing for a party, perhaps, looking in her jewelry box for an appropriate set of earrings or a bracelet; or when she was dressed in old clothes, cleaning the bedroom, and saw it there, the string of beads. At such times a trembling would seize her, as if an angry signal were buzzing in her brain. She'd stop, her forehead puckered. "Now, where the devil did I get those?" she'd wonder. And then, "Oh, of course, college," and she'd smile, tolerant of her sentimentality, and turn away.

III

Bill was a lawyer. He'd wanted to live in a small town, but she was unaccountably furious at the suggestion. When he asked why, she snapped, "Oh, just because . . . there are more advantages in a city, for one thing." Besides, she really didn't know *why*. "You want to be known as William Watkins, that brilliant young lawyer, don't you? Well, you won't," she said, "if you stick yourself in some old hamlet." She giggled and kissed him and took him to bed.

They decided, finally, on Albany, and as soon as Olive discovered it had a good university, she cajoled Win to take her Master's degree there, and needled Cynthia until she and her husband moved nearby. "And wouldn't it be fun, wouldn't it, to organize a chapter of our old college sorority?" she asked, and when they were immediately enthusiastic, she put an ad in the paper. There were, in all, nine members.

"Isn't it a coincidence, well, isn't it? All nine of us living in the same city?" And they smiled and nodded, and met once a month. Time after time she told Bill she was going to quit. She was so tired after a meeting. "Though God knows why," she'd say; "we actually don't do much." Sometimes, on special occasions, she'd wear the chestnut beads, you know, just for a joke.

The war craze broke out in 1965. Olive bought the family a survival kit, and packed it neatly in the cellar with stacks of canned food. "I know you don't *like* beans, darling, but they're just loaded with vitamins."

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Johnnie was born that year, and Sue the next. And all the time the war news rattled like dry skeletons, clinking over the aerial wires. The television pinpointed arid lands and agonized faces. "Well, I mean . . . You just can't eat your dinner in peace any more, with that kind of thing staring out from the set at your mashed potatoes."

But she made Bill buy her a rifle, and a pistol, and give her shooting lessons in the yard. It caused quite a commotion in the neighborhood. On summer nights, the men and women sipped their tom collinses outside, leaning over the Watkins' fence, shouting good-natured comments, laughing, with their soft voices falling like pebbles on the patio.

It was, in fact, the consensus that Olive Watkins was the most all-around woman the neighbors knew. She was a member of a fencing class and an archery club, and she even learned to grow her own herbs in a window box in the kitchen.

When her little daughter turned six and joined the Brownies, it was only natural that Olive be chosen as a scout mother. Each week she met with eleven shining, bright-eyed little girls. They went on hikes in the Spring and Fall, learned to tell mushrooms from toadstools, and picked dandelion greens on the hillside a short way from town. "You know, they have to know all that stuff to get their medals," Olive explained to their mothers over tea.

All in all, Bill Watkins had little to regret and a lot to be thankful for in the seven years of their marriage. Olive won a citation for defense work, helped with first aid at the hospital, and yet never for a moment neglected him or the children. Her energy put him to shame.

An excellent mother. A good wife. Though sometimes her passion frightened him, and when she clawed at him in the darkness, panting heavily, he'd feel, well not frightened, but . . . embarrassed, a trifle uneasy, as if beside him there was a dark, hungry thing, all mouth. She looked up once, surprising the baffled look on his face. "Olive, Olive honey," he said, and she sprang out of bed, glared at him with glowing contempt, and slept on the couch that night.

In the morning she was smiling. They never mentioned the incident, but he never forgot it. He thought of it sometimes when he caught her staring at the children with fierce speculation, as if measuring them against some impossibly high rule of achievement. "Olive, Olive honey, they're only babies," he'd say, and she'd slap the children playfully on their bottoms and kiss him, standing on tiptoe.

More often than not, he closed himself in the library nights. Sometimes he read his law books, but usually there were clients to see.

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He liked to sit there working, with the women's voices murmuring from the living room, their soft laughter, and the sounds of teacups clinking on saucers.

Olive and Cynthia, being members of the same organizations, saw each other most usually in the day. Except for bridge, of course, which they all played every Tuesday night in Cynthia's new suburban home. Win came in the evenings, when she was finished with classes for the day and sick of the dark university halls.

They were never apart, the three of them, for any amount of time. The last summer Win did take a brief vacation; but she returned earlier than she had planned, and wondered, when she re-entered her dull university room, why on earth she hadn't stayed longer. In the back of her mind, she was uneasy that season, nervous, on edge. She felt as if an era was finished, as if something . . . vital was dying, slowing down with a quiet whimper, like a clock in an old room.

"I feel odd," she said. "As if something were going to happen."

Olive nodded. "I've felt funny, too. And dreams! I've dreamed an awful lot, lately."

It was too cold now to sit on the patio, and the wind came in, with a chill, through the open screen door. "You're both crazy," Cynthia laughed, and picked a cake crumb from her expensive fall suit. "I've felt wonderful lately. I've never felt better," she added emphatically, sipping her tea, thinking that after all, Olive would have been smarter to do her kitchen in white. It was so much easier to get appliances to match.

The next day it happened, the day for which they had been trained; the inevitable day when mushrooms blossomed in all the streets, their monstrous roots upturning cities; the day that the males had brought down upon the earth.

IV

It was mid-October, and the heat from the furnace had just been turned on for the winter. It came up with growls and thumps—a prehistoric monster routed from its metallic prison. Olive pulled the curtains apart to watch for the mailman. Across the street a parked car bore early Halloween scars, and she smiled, and popped three frozen beef pies in the oven. It was almost time to pick up the children for lunch.

Cynthia was preparing to go to school, too, but she didn't need the car, because she only lived a block away. It was Bobby's first semester in first grade. She liked to meet him outside, watch him run out with all the other children, and think, "That one, that one's mine," and grab him up, laughing to hear him chatter all the way home.

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Win was eating lunch at the university cafeteria. She had wanted an egg salad sandwich, but remembered her calories, and ordered a plain salad instead, and coffee. She found an empty seat, and sat down.

At the same time, on the other side of the city, Olive went into her neat bedroom, ran a comb through her short black hair, and slipped into a tight tweed skirt, green sweater and suede pumps.

Civilized, self-possessed, beautifully attired. She had filled out some, in the places where a woman should. After all, she thought, who wants to look like a stick anyway? She broke a nail, swore, repaired it deftly, and slipped her car keys into her brown alligator bag.

Olive knew immediately what had happened. The moment she saw the flash of light in the bedroom mirror, she screamed and dropped to the floor. The intense glacial whiteness struck at the house like a shaft of summer lightning. She clenched her eyes shut. Three seconds, three seconds. The words plagued her as she inched her way on her stomach and huddled beneath the window. Three seconds before the blast!

And then it rose up in the center of the world, a terrible, shining god, at whose touch worshipers turned to ash. The windowpanes flew across the room, crashed on the far wall. She heard her heart pound against the floorboards. Her breasts hurt with the weight of her body.

Finally she stood up, dazed, watching like a second person while her image ran from window to empty window closing the blinds. Books and glass littered the floor. The buffet had fallen over. Oh, God! Bill and the children! But surely, surely they knew what to do at the school. They'd had drills. Oh, God! Yet all the time she moved quickly, without panic.

The coveralls were where she had packed them. Methodically she put them on over her clothes, and took out the old garden gloves. She lifted the chestnut necklace from the jewelry box, and slipped it in her pocket. The sirens started just as she reached the cellar door. A little late for a warning, she thought, and watched the elegant Japanese lamp lift itself up in the air and float gently down.

The house screamed, teetered to one side. She stumbled down the inside cellar stairs and huddled in the corner by the home laundry. There were three more blasts. With the second the house fell apart. The cement patio was the roof of the cellar. It held. She lit a cigarette automatically and wondered if it was safe to go outside.

Only then, when she had done all the necessary things, did she really think of her family. Realization was a shock circling her skull. They could be dead, her babies, ly-

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ing disjointed, like broken dolls with their stuffing . . . Oh, God! Or Bill trapped somewhere in a restaurant downtown.

She ran to the window, pushing aside the debris that had fallen in from outside. Maybe someone would bring them home to her. Maybe—

But the anguish was manufactured, and she knew it.

Frantically she tried to push herself to violent, sickening fear. But she was stick-dry. Parched like a wishbone left too long on the back of the stove. Only her mind functioned. It commanded her to take the guns down from the wall and slip the pistol in the pocket of her coveralls.

This is what your training was for, it said. *This moment and the time that will come after. This day which the males have brought down upon the earth. This is what your training is for. Release your memory. Call forth the gods of vengeance.*

Training? She must be going crazy. Shock, maybe.

Look at the beads. Look at the beads.

It was silly, stupid at a time like this! Why on earth had she carried that ridiculous string of beads with her in the first place? Instead of money . . . or something?

Look at the beads.

The words of her mind became a part of her muscles. She clawed, frantically, at the necklace.

College. The initiation. God, how frightened she'd been when she dashed up those steps and threw open the door! White-faced and tense, she'd stood there, with the hooded figures in a semicircle about her.

"Well, let's get it over with," she'd said, shrilly, with Cynthia and Win behind her. The figures moved back to let them pass. Olive was shaking. Where were the repressed giggles? Surely someone would break down and laugh. What were they so quiet for? Of course, to frighten them. She grinned jauntily to let them know she'd go along. Anything for a laugh, she'd thought, and giggled once against the silence.

The figures moved back against the wall. They were a part of it now like a wallpaper pattern. Only out of the corner of your eye you could sense them moving as if the paper was loose and a wind was blowing. A woman strode out in the center of the room. A candle in her hand stretched yellow fingers toward her wooden mask.

It was Lounze! Olive had known it immediately, without knowing how she knew. A wooden mask, really, she thought, and turned to nudge Cynthia and Win. But they weren't there. She searched the shadows anxiously. Lounze made a small movement and Olive swung around. Throughout the room there was a sucking in of breath, a tensing. They just let her stand there.

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The universe was closing in. Lounze was the preacher, the parades, the panic, all in one.

Lounze began to speak. "Women are the creators."

"The creators. The creators. The creators," they chanted.

"Men are the destroyers."

"The destroyers, the destroyers."

"We have banded together from the ends of the earth."

"From the ends, from the ends of the earth."

"To protect what we have created, to preserve the secrets of our kind, to prepare ourselves for the destruction that even now the males are calling down upon the earth. Throughout the ages have we banded together; women in the jungles, in hidden valleys, in the concrete caverns of gigantic cities. Once more will we be asked to rise in vengeance and in blood. To recreate the universe. Only when our vengeance is consumed, only from the awful vitality of our hatred can the new creation be accomplished.

"Creation is not a kind act. It is an act of cruelty, an act of hatred against the darkness. A time is approaching when our hate must kill our love; when love can grow again only from the rotting seeds of rage."

They were swaying with the words, screaming, punctuating the sentences with weird gestures that bent them in half. Olive lifted her head and stared defiantly at Lounze.

"We will terrorize the weak," Lounze yelled, and Olive licked her lips, unable to move her eyes. "Terrorize the weak," she yelled with the others. "Women are the creators, the creators, the creators." The voices were silent and Lounze stepped forward.

"This will I tell you, initiates, brought here for the first time. The choice is yours, to join or not to join. Either way, you will not remember what happens here. But when the day comes, those who are not of us are enemies."

Beside her, Olive was conscious of Cynthia and Win. They took their places without speaking. Olive made no motion to leave, though at Lounze's words someone unlatched the door. She could feel a draft on her ankles. Then it was gone. Affirmation rushed into the vacuum where her fear had been. This is what she had feared and waited for. In the face of it she felt only triumph.

The chanting began again. She was seized, violently, and her body hair was shaved away. Bucketfuls of ice water were thrown over her goose-pimpled skin and a ceremonial oil rubbed in deeply until it penetrated every pore with an odor of rotting animals and musk.

She was dead now to the person that she had been, dressed in a white cotton gown, reborn in the sisterhood with a new name. When it was done, they were pushed before Lounze, on their knees, and

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rigid wooden masks were slammed down over their faces.

"I am the BUNDU, *the She-Devil. Henceforth you are Digmas or initiates. We will teach you to live on two levels, to condition yourselves so that each meeting remains hidden from your conscious minds. You will obey orders, rationalizing them to your consciousness. Only when the time arrives will you rise up, cast out pretence, and gather with us in vengeance."*

There was a hush. Win and Cynthia were whisked away to the edges of the circle. Lounze stepped forward and turned to Olive. "Henceforth you are called Migma," she said, and placed the chestnut beads around her neck. "These are a promise between us. One day you will be a BUNDU. *Then the beads will be a symbol of power which all must obey. When the time comes, you will cast out Olive, and Migma, the* BUNDU, *will take her place."*

And in her cellar retreat, Olive lifted her head. She looked around her at the game corner, the laundry, the old chest that still held Christmas decorations. "Migma?" she said, once, crying for her husband and children and the world so lately lost.

"Migma?" Olive asked again, and was quiet.

Migma left her there and went outside.

V

The air was fogful, heavy. Migma stood there, her black hair tangled, the rifle slung over her shoulder, surveying what was left of the city. Coldly she noted its geography. The city rose on a plain. To the east was the Hudson. The house had been on a hill, and even the cellar would afford a place of observation. Dust settled down. A few figures moved here and there, bending over, darting in and out of the remaining buildings. She stacked all the rubble she could find around the outside of the cellar, reinforced the walls, and piled the porch timber by the door.

Only when she was satisfied that the cellar was well camouflaged did she go inside to wait the month through as they had planned. She knew that others also waited, in caves and debris-ridden shadows, that they purged themselves, nursed their hatred, while outside the bomb dust was night-thick.

They would not emerge until hope was dead; until the weak were devoured by the strong, until chaos boiled and despair was daily bread. For the month Olive and Migma were closed in together. Olive cried in the morning and in the evening, sobbing for the universe that she could no longer understand, begging to be allowed to run just once through the city, calling her husband's name.

That afternoon she sat with her

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hands over her ears to shut out the screaming. Once Olive heard a neighbor's voice and tried to spring up. "It's Mattie, Mattie Lundgren," she cried, remembering morning coffee, home permanents they gave each other in the kitchen, long walks, hanging up clothes together in the yard.

Migma gritted her teeth and didn't move. "Please, please." Olive bit her fingernails and squatted on the floor. "Please, oh God, please," she whimpered and Migma listened, scornful, with her lips drawn back. *Cast out Olive.* Wasn't the command clear enough? Before she could lead the others, she must conquer herself. In the morning, coolly, she made her plans.

Olive loved animals. Migma went outside and crouched by the cellar door. She whistled softly, between her teeth, waiting patiently until a small dog slunk across the rubbish, and stood, whimpering. She held out an open can of hamburgers.

"Here, here, boy," she coaxed, making him come all the way, pulling the can back farther and farther, watching with her dark eyes narrowed. And quick, quick as he circled the can, she stabbed him, and stood staring as the body went limp. Methodically she took out a handkerchief and forced herself to watch as her fingers cleaned the knife of blood. Olive screamed until consciousness was nothing but her pain, her tragic bewilderment. Migma was triumphant. Half-mad, she turned and left the dog there in the open so she would not forget.

Looters came like locusts crawling over the dead body of the city. Migma frightened two gangs away, but the third was more desperate, and they barged down the cellar stairs, hooting. She had seen them for days, in the shadows, surveying the cellar, and judging the strength of her defenses. It was twilight when they came. She heard their muffled voices outside, and hid behind the washer, her gun ready, breathing softly.

"Stop, or I'll shoot," she yelled, and at the sound of her voice one of the men laughed. "It's a woman, a dame. Be good, baby, and you won't get hurt." He lunged forward, and she shot him. The others stood unbelievingly, looking from her to the body. "Get out," she screamed. They ran, shoving against each other, and she winged one just as he reached the door.

When they left she looked down at the body, at the brown, muddy hairs that leapt upward from the blood-filthy shirt. He had been . . . what? she wondered. A taxi driver, a salesman? The delicate mechanism of his anatomy was forever shattered. He had breathed in and out only a few moments before. He had been conscious of what? Her figure in the darkness, the nearness of food, the sound of his footsteps on the cement cellar floor. And now, already, his brain died,

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whispered away. Tears wet her lashes. Then she remembered her purpose. "I don't . . . hate enough," she yelled, and beheaded him and carried the corpse outside. She hung it on a post, by the dog. "That's for Olive," she said.

Bobby was already waiting outside when Cynthia arrived at the school. She tried to make him hurry, but he was trading marbles and cried when she took his hand.

Cars were lined up at the curb, and horns blowing. Someone threw a snowball. It hit Bobby, and he cried, and dropped his marbles in the snow. "I want them, I want them," he sobbed, and sighing, Cynthia salvaged them and stuck them in her bag.

"Come on, it's late," she said. They crossed the street just as the light changed, and were halfway down the block when someone screamed, and the flash came. Without thinking, she threw Bobby down in the gutter and shielded him with her body. There was a moment before time closed in; a sucking up of creation before the blast shattered itself and the street to fragments. A tree fell on the other side of the sidewalk. It made a roof over Cynthia's body and hit Bobby just as he wiggled his head free.

"Bobby?" she asked. "Bobby?"—and when he didn't answer, *"Bobby?"* She stood up, screaming, while fragments of roof settled gently down, and houses spun like tops. "My baby, my baby," she yelled, and ran with him in her arms to what was left of her home. The living room was still there. She laughed, crazily, and ran to the kitchen for water.

Cold water would bring him back to consciousness. It would, it would, she whispered, refusing to accept his stillness. The kitchen ceiling lay in heaps on top of the refrigerator and stove. It blocked the doorway. "Bobby, it's going to be all right," she called, and ran to the steps leading upstairs. They were piled like a giant's accordion on the floor of the dining room.

"I'm here, mommie's here," she crooned, and picked Bobby up, and carried him to the cellar. "Everything is all right, all right," she repeated. Outside the world pulsed, shrank, exploded again.

This is the time to remember. The day of vengeance. Release your memory, her mind said.

Angrily she shoved the thought away. What a foolish thing to think, with Bobby sick, and needing her. Her baby needed her. There wasn't time for anything else. "Bobby, do you feel better now? Bobby? Shall I tell you a story? Bobby?"

She watched and listened and petted him and crooned. She coaxed and pleaded and told him more stories and combed his matted hair. She bent over and listened for his heartbeat. When she touched him she began screaming.

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Later she buried him outside where his sandbox used to be.

Two days passed. Her husband never came home.

Release your memory. Rise and cast out Cynthia. Release your memory, her mind said. She hummed, loud, to blot out the words. She counted, slowly, to a hundred, she recited the alphabet. But her mind had more strength.

Release your memory, it commanded, and finally, when she could fight it no longer, she remembered the initiation, and all the meetings in between up to the present. But it had all happened so long ago. Surely they didn't expect her to take it seriously now? Her world was gone. Didn't they understand? There was nothing left to fight for.

She straightened her hair clumsily, and started for Olive's. Olive would know what to do. Olive was the only person she had left, and Win. If they were alive. The streets were mazes of debris. People called out to her as she ran. Hands grabbed out toward her, but she hastened her footsteps, and shoved them away.

This couldn't be, not Albany! Bobby and Olive's Billy had played together, right on this street. She and Olive had sipped coffee and watched from the porch. And where was the house now? Where? And how could you tell one rubbish heap from the other?

She stopped crying long enough to poke around in the debris. The cellar door was hidden. But it had to be there. "Olive? Olive?"

Migma stood at the door, bracing herself against the voice. She pulled Cynthia inside, quick, not speaking.

"Olive? Why don't you say something? Olive?" Cynthia hadn't worn coveralls. Her dress was ripped, bloodstained, and her delicately boned face pale. "Don't just stand there staring at me! Olive! Are your . . . children all right? Olive?"

Migma stood there, hating Cynthia for her weakness, trying to shove back her own pity. "Go back," she said, fingering the chestnut beads for support.

"Back? Where?" Cynthia's face contorted itself into a grimace of unbelief. "There isn't any place to go."

"To the cellar, to wherever you're hiding out. Go there and stay there. Get a hold of yourself." It was all Migma could manage to say. She made the words bitter to hide her own weakness.

Cynthia shrank back against the wall. "Don't you understand? My Bobby's dead. Dead, Olive!"

"My name is Migma. You are Fion, reborn in the sisterhood with a new name." Migma was shaking, but she slapped Cynthia, hard, when she began screaming, and calling her husband's name.

"Stop it, you idiot. Stop it!" she yelled. "Go back to your cellar.

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Stay there and purge yourself. You are Fion now. Let your sorrow turn to hatred," and in pity, she called out the warning, "Remember I'm sworn to purge the order of weakness, sworn, Cynthia." She shoved the other woman outside, and bolted the door.

By the middle of the month, the radio went dead. The United States, England, Russia, all these were less than names, syllables carried on the wind with no meaning, to be merged in the mind with the fables of Atlantis and Babylon. The erratic screams no longer rent the air with demoniac punctuation. Silence dropped down upon the mouth of Albany like a hand smothering all breath.

And when the month was through, Migma was ready, purged, hate-strong, a sorceress, and about her neck the chestnut beads.

Creation is not a kind act. It is an act of cruelty, an act of hatred against the darkness. She spoke the words aloud and prepared to leave. The air was crisp, and the ruins were still. She took her rifle, pistol, a kit of supplies and looked back once to where the house had been, the porches and green lawns.

Here and there broken towers stuck up like deformed claws. Bodies in various stages of decomposition littered the landscape. She walked swiftly, deliberately, marking the shops that were still standing, the stores that still might hold food or supplies.

A jeep was what she wanted. It took three hours for her to find one that was usable, and this in a garage. The streets yielded only empty hulks, dead chrome beetles with headlights staring upward. The roof of the garage was bashed in, but she found gas and drove the jeep out from underneath the rubble. The garage collapsed in a heap behind her.

VI

There had been no time for an exodus. There was no evidence of refugees on Route 9W. For the first time in years the road was silent, uneasy, wondering what had happened to the tourists that sped, in past times, to Saratoga Springs, Saranac Lake, and Montreal. The gasoline stations that lined the highway were quiet. The motels had no guests. Here and there a few deer crossed the white road.

Ten miles above Albany Migma left the road and drove across country toward the river. The meeting place was on a hill. She parked the jeep and surveyed the land. Her footfalls crunched dry leaves; chipmunks scurried for shelter, and here and there a few patches of snow showed through the pines. Below, in the Hudson, gray water rushed beneath thin layers of December ice.

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She was tempted to sleep in the car, but the others would have to sleep on the ground, so she made a shelter of pine branches and pulled her coat over her for a blanket. She could be herself now for the last time.

Cynthia and Win arrived in the morning. Migma wanted to rise up and greet them, recall their old friendship, the quiet ritual of their days. But she sat, impassive, staring, and when they approached, she stood up.

"Women are the creators."

The figures stopped short. Win began to repeat the words, but Cynthia burst into tears, and threw herself on Migma's shoulder. "Olive, Olive, oh, what's happened to us all? What's happened, and everything gone. Everything!" Her hands made small, futile gestures in the air. "What are we going to do? What?" She dropped her arms from Migma's shoulders and stared into her face. "What's the matter? Why don't you say something? *Anything?* What are you staring for? I . . . know I don't look much like myself. But then none of us do." She brightened, and tried to smile. "I went back . . . like you told me to. I waited. Olive? Olive?"

Migma let the woods swallow the words and waited until the shock of hearing her old name had worn away.

Then she slapped her, hard, and stood staring as she sprawled on the ground. "Get up," she snapped, her anger sweeping her on. "Identify yourself. The Olives and the Cynthias are dead. I am Migma, the Bundu, the She-Devil. Give your new name, your new name," she shouted, white-faced.

"I am Fion." Cynthia pulled herself clumsily to her feet. "Women are the creators," she said, smiling childishly when she saw Migma was placated.

"And you?"

"I am Hesta," Win said. She stood as straight as Migma, her face scarred, staring rigidly forward. Her head was completely bald, and her brows singed. They stared at each other a moment, a circuit of strength between them. The three women sat down.

Between Migma and Hesta the silence was complete. They knew, without speaking, that they were united in strength and purpose. Cynthia bit her lips and plucked bits of grass and pine from her dirty skirt.

Hesta looked up. "When will the others come?"

"Soon."

"My baby was killed. He was nearly six. I was going to ask you both to his party." Cynthia smiled hesitantly. "I even had his presents."

"Do we have enough supplies?" It was Hesta, trying to keep her voice even.

"Plenty. When the others come,

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we'll organize looting parties." They were speaking quickly now, filling in the gaps of silence.

"He was pretty for a boy. I got him a new suit. You should have seen it. His daddy . . ."

"Make us some coffee. Make yourself useful." Migma turned on her. "And for God's sake, stop mumbling."

In the firelight their faces hung like lanterns. They drank the black liquid from tin cups, and opened a can of pork and beans. When Cynthia fell into an exhausted sleep, Migma and Hesta sat up, talking, but restrained, unsure of the new relationship.

"Will she be all right?" Hesta nodded toward Cynthia.

"Who knows?" Migma shivered and pulled her jacket tighter about her shoulders.

They came, the others, in twos and threes all during the week. They squatted in the forest, weary-eyed and lean, disheveled and forsaken, these women who had been impeccably dressed housewives, clerks, secretaries and teachers. They drank old supermarket coffee from tin cups, guzzled cans of pork and beans, made beds from prickly pines and slept in the open —these women accustomed to feather mattresses, immaculate kitchens, and quiet rooms.

Their eyes were listless, their faces scarred and broken. They had come because there was no other place to go. They were like mindless, dry leaves, driven by the wind, yet Migma's eyes glowed when she saw them. And one by one, in that first week, they were put to trial. But Migma most of all, for it was she who must command them, who must bend them to her will. And those who did not pass the trials were stoned and banished, and Migma knew this was a death sentence, and forced herself to throw the first stone. Even against Fion, when the third night came.

As the ceremony began, Migma stood before them and chanted the necessary words.

We must be purged and beaten dry.
Only hate at our bosom lie.
Eat our heart, deny our breast
Till vengeance only bring us rest.

Blood of bat, entrails all,
Between our teeth the bitter gall.
Hate alone will make the earth
Regurgitate its dead to birth.

And Cynthia stood, trembling, in the center of the circle. In her faltering fingers a knife flashed, and before her a trapped kitten spat. She looked at them, at the hard-set, bitter-worn, sorrow-frozen faces, and her hands fluttered, and she looked down at the kitten, and back at them again.

Then, with a strange courage of her own, she dropped the knife.

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"Pretty kitty, pretty kitty," she crooned and picked the kitten up, cradling him in her arms like a baby. "Pretty kitty. I say, Pretty kitty," she screamed defiantly.

Migma swayed, but she yelled, "Stone her," and picked up a rock and led them against her.

"Pretty kitty," Cynthia hollered, wildly, and her hair flying. The cat meowed, leapt up, scratched her face and sprang down. Cynthia's eyes widened in horror. Her hand reached to her face and there was blood on her fingers. She stood there unbelieving, Cynthia who could not change, and they chased her, jeering, to the end of the forest, and threw her a kit of supplies and left her there.

After, Migma walked past the several huts they had already constructed. Huddled together, in groups, the others watched her as she passed. Hesta disentangled herself from one of the gatherings.

"They know . . . that you and Cynthia were friends."

"I know."

"They don't think you'll spare anyone. They're frightened," Hesta said looking back at them.

But Migma gestured toward the city. "We must be hard and strong. There is no room for weakness in *this* world. Hatred must purify us. We must wreak our vengeance upon man, drive him on with hatred. You know that."

The moon shone down on Hesta's bald head. Migma wanted to thank her, but she said, "You had to do it. Purge yourself. And so did I."

But Hesta shook her head. "They'll hate you," she said.

And Migma turned in anger. "Don't you think I know? Do you think it's easy?" and her eyes glowed, and she spoke softly now. "They'll hate me, yes, but fear me more. And soon they'll love me with a greater passion than they ever loved a man. The sisterhood will survive, survive until we have driven man on to godhood, until he is worthy of us once more," and Hesta nodded and turned away, going back to the others.

"Now the work can begin," Migma thought triumphantly. Tomorrow she would give orders for supply groups to start out, for the traps to be laid. Tomorrow they would be ready for the stragglers, the survivors, and already the huts were built that would house separately the men and the women.

The women would be taught, the children taught and cherished, and the men, the betrayers, sent to till fields anew, to build new altars to old gods, to be servants until the women's hatred, the witches' hatred taught them again the ancient truths. Her training was over. Now she could lead them through vengeance until once more the hearth fires burned. And she sat alone, Migma, the Bundu, the She-Devil, fingering her chestnut beads.

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In a poignant September song, Mr. Young's sensitive mind contemplates the future of the prestige car, the philosophical bartender, the little red teleschool, and man's inhumanity to androids.

Thirty Days Had September

by ROBERT F. YOUNG

THE SIGN IN THE WINDOW SAID: SCHOOLTEACHER FOR SALE, DIRT CHEAP; and, in smaller letters: CAN COOK, SEW, AND IS HANDY AROUND THE HOUSE.

She made Danby think of desks and erasers and autumn leaves; of books and dreams and laughter. The proprietor of the little secondhand store had adorned her with a gay-colored dress and had slipped little red sandals on her feet, and she stood in her upright case in the window like a life-size doll waiting for someone to bring her to life.

Danby tried to move on down the spring street to the parking lot where he kept his Baby Buick. Laura probably had his supper all dialed and waiting on the table for him, and she would be furious if he was late. But he went right on standing where he was, tall and thin, his youth not quite behind him, still lingering in his brown, wistful eyes, showing faintly in the softness of his cheeks.

His inertia annoyed him. He'd passed the store a thousand times on his way from the parking lot to his office and on his way from his office to the parking lot, but this was the first time he'd ever stopped and looked in the window.

But wasn't this the first time the window had ever contained something that he wanted?

Danby tried to face the question. Did he *want* a schoolteacher? Well hardly. But Laura certainly needed someone to help her with the housework and they couldn't afford an automatic maid, and Billy certainly could stand some extra-TV tutoring, with the boxtop tests coming up, and—

And— And her hair made him think of September sunlight, her face, of a September day. A September mist settled around him

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and all of a sudden his inertia left him and he began to walk—but not in the direction he had intended to go. . . .

"How much is the schoolteacher in the window?" he asked.

Antiques of every description were scattered about the interior of the store. The proprietor was a little old man with bushy white hair and gingerbread eyes. He looked like an antique himself.

He beamed at Danby's question. "You like her, sir? She's very lovely."

Danby's face felt warm. "How much?" he repeated.

"Forty-nine ninety-five, plus five dollars for the case."

Danby could hardly believe it. With schoolteachers so rare, you'd think the price would go up, not down. And yet, less than a year ago, when he'd been thinking of buying a rebuilt third grade teacher to help Billy with his TV-schoolwork, the lowest-priced one he could find had run well over a hundred dollars. He would have bought her even at that, though, if Laura hadn't talked him out of it. Laura had never gone to real-school and didn't understand.

But forty-nine ninety-five! And she could cook and sew too! Surely Laura wouldn't try to talk him out of buying this one—

She definitely wouldn't if he didn't give her the chance.

"Is— Is she in good condition?"

The proprietor's face grew pained. "She's been completely overhauled, sir. Brand new batteries, brand new motors. Her tapes are good for another ten years yet, and her memory banks will probably last forever. Here, I'll bring her in and show you."

The case was mounted on castors, but it was awkward to handle. Danby helped the old man push it out of the window and into the store. They stood it by the door where the light was brightest.

The old man stepped back admiringly. "Maybe I'm old-fashioned," he said, "but I still say that teleteachers will never compare to the real thing. You went to real-school, didn't you, sir?"

Danby nodded.

"I thought so. Funny the way you can always tell."

"Turn her on, please," Danby said.

The activator was a tiny button, hidden behind the left ear lobe. The proprietor fumbled for a moment before he found it; then there was a little *click!*, followed by a soft, almost inaudible, purring sound. Presently, color crept into the cheeks, the breast began to rise and fall; blue eyes opened—

Danby's fingernails were digging into the palms of his hands. "Make her say something."

"She responds to almost everything, sir," the old man said. "Words, scenes, situations . . . If you decide to take her and aren't satisfied, bring her back and I'll

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be glad to refund your money." He faced the case. "What is your name?" he asked.

"Miss Jones." Her voice was a September wind.

"Your occupation?"

"Specifically, I'm a fourth grade teacher, sir, but I can substitute for first, second, third, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, and I'm well-grounded in the humanities. Also, I'm proficient in household chores, am a qualified cook, and can perform simple tasks, such as sewing on buttons, darning socks, and repairing rips and tears in clothing."

"They put a lot of extras in the later models," the old man said in an aside to Danby. "When they finally realized that teleducation was here to stay, they started doing everything they could to beat the cereal companies. But it didn't do any good." Then: "Step outside your case, Miss Jones. Show us how nice you walk."

She walked once around the drab room, her little red sandals twinkling over the dusty floor, her dress a gay little rainfall of color. Then she returned and stood waiting by the door.

Danby found it difficult to talk. "All right," he said finally. "Put her back in her case. I'll take her."

"Something for me, Dad?" Billy shouted. "Something for me?"

"Sure thing," Danby said, trundling the case up the walk and lifting it onto the diminutive front porch. "For your mother, too."

"Whatever it is, it better be good," Laura said, arms folded in the doorway. "Supper's stone cold."

"You can warm it up," Danby said. "Watch out, Billy!"

He lifted the case over the threshold, breathing a little hard, and shoved it down the short hall and into the living room. The living room was preempted by a pink-coated pitchman who had invited himself in via the 120″ screen and who was loudly proclaiming the superiority of the new 2061 Lincolnette convertible.

"Be careful of the rug!" Laura said.

"Don't get excited, I'm not going to hurt your rug," Danby said. "And will somebody please turn off TV so we can hear ourselves think!"

"I'll turn it off, Dad." Billy made nine-year-old strides across the room and killed the pitchman, pink coat and all.

Danby fumbled with the cover of the case, aware of Laura's breath on the back of his neck. "A schoolteacher!" she gasped, when it finally came open. "Of all the things for a grown man to bring home to his wife! A schoolteacher."

"She's not an ordinary schoolteacher," Danby said. "She can cook, she can sew, she— She can do just about anything. You're always saying you need a maid. Well

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now you've got one. And Billy's got someone to help him with his TV-lessons."

"How much?" For the first time Danby realized what a narrow face his wife had.

"Forty-nine ninety-five."

"Forty-nine ninety-five! George, are you crazy? Here I've been saving our money so we could turn in our Baby B. for a new Cadillette, and you go throwing it away on an old broken-down schoolteacher. What does *she* know about teleducation? Why, she's fifty years behind the times!"

"She's not going to help *me* with *my* TV-lessons!" Billy said, glowering at the case. "My TV-teacher said those old android teachers weren't good for anything. They— They used to *hit* kids!"

"They did not!" Danby said. "And I should know because I went to realschool all the way to eighth grade." He turned to Laura. "And she's not broken down either, and she's not fifty years behind the times, and she knows more about *real* education than your teleteachers ever will! And like I said, she can sew, she can cook—"

"Well, tell her to warm up our supper then!"

"I will!"

He reached into the case, depressed the little activator button, and, when the blue eyes opened, said: "Come with me, Miss Jones," and led her into the kitchen.

He was delighted at the way she responded to his instructions as to which buttons to push, which levers to raise and lower, which indicators to point at which numerals— Supper was off the table in a jiffy and back on again in the wink of an eye, all warm and steaming and delectable.

Even Laura was mollified. "Well . . ." she said.

"Well I guess!" Danby said. "I said she could cook, didn't I? Now you won't have to complain any more about jammed buttons and broken fingernails and—"

"All right, George. Don't rub it in."

Her face was back to normal again, still a little on the thin side of course, but that was part of its attractiveness under ordinary circumstances; that, and her dark, kindling eyes and exquisitely made-up mouth. She'd just had her breasts built up again and she really looked terrific in her new gold and scarlet loungerie. Danby decided he could have done far worse. He put his finger under her chin and kissed her. "Come on, let's eat," he said.

For some reason he'd forgotten about Billy. Glancing up from the table, he saw his son standing in the doorway, staring balefully at Miss Jones who was busy with the coffee.

"She's not going to hit me!" Billy said, answering Danby's glance.

Danby laughed. He felt better,

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now that half the battle was won. The other half could be taken care of later. "Of course she's not going to hit you," he said. "Now come over and eat your supper like a good boy."

"Yes," Laura said, "and hurry up. *Romeo and Juliet* is on the Western Hour and I don't want to miss a minute of it."

Billy relented. "Oh, all right!" he said. But he gave Miss Jones a wide berth as he walked into the kitchen and took his place at the table.

Romeo Montague twisted a cigarette with deft fingers, put it between sombrero-shadowed _ lips and lit it with a kitchen match. Then he guided his sleek palomino down the moonlit hillside to the Capulet ranch house.

"Guess I better be a mite keerful," he soliloquized. "These hyar Capulets, being sheepherders an' hereditary enemies o' my fambly, who are noble cattlemen, would gun me down afore I knowed what happened if'n they got the chance. But this gal I met at the wrassle tonight is worth a mite o' danger."

Danby frowned. He had nothing against rewriting the classics but it seemed to him that the rewrite men were overdoing the cattlemen-sheepmen deal. Laura and Billy didn't seem to mind, however. They were hunched forward in their viewchairs, gazing raptly at the 120″ screen. So maybe the rewrite men knew what they were doing at that.

Even Miss Jones seemed interested . . . but that was impossible, Danby quickly reminded himself. She *couldn't* be interested. No matter how intelligently her blue eyes might be focused on the screen, all she was doing, really, was sitting there wasting her batteries. He should have taken Laura's advice and turned her off—

But somehow he just hadn't had the heart. There was an element of cruelty in depriving her of life, even temporarily.

Now *there* was a ridiculous notion, if ever a man had one. Danby shifted irritably in his viewchair and his irritation intensified when he realized that he'd lost the thread of the play. By the time he regained it, Romeo had scaled the wall of the Capulet rancho, had crept through the orchard, and was standing in a gaudy garden beneath a low balcony.

Juliet Capulet stepped onto the balcony via a pair of anachronistic french doors. She was wearing a white cowgirl—or sheepgirl—suit with a thigh-length skirt, and a wide-brimmed sombrero crowned her bleached blond tresses. She leaned over the balcony railing, peered down into the garden. "Where y'all at, Rome?" she drawled.

"Why this is ridiculous!" Miss Jones said abruptly. "The words,

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the costumes, the action, the place— Everything's wrong!"

Danby stared at her. He remembered suddenly what the proprietor of the secondhand store had said about her responding to scenes and situations as well as words. He'd assumed, of course, that the old man had meant scenes and situations directly connected with her duties as a teacher, not *all* scenes and situations.

An annoying little premonition skipped through Danby's mind. Both Laura and Billy, he noticed, had turned from their visual repast and were regarding Miss Jones with disbelieving eyes. The moment was a critical one.

He cleared his throat. "The play isn't really 'wrong,' Miss Jones," he said. "It's just been rewritten. You see, nobody would watch it in the original, and if no one watched it, what would be the sense of anyone sponsoring it?"

"But did they have to make it a *Western?*"

Danby glanced apprehensively at his wife. The disbelief in her eyes had been replaced by furious resentment. Hastily he returned his attention to Miss Jones.

"Westerns are the rage now, Miss Jones," he explained. "It's sort of a revival of the early TV period. People like them, so naturally sponsors sponsor them and writers go way out of their way to find new material for them."

"But Juliet in a cowgirl suit! It's beneath the standards of even the lowest medium of entertainment."

"All right, George, that's enough." Laura's voice was cold. "I told you she was fifty years behind the times. Either turn her off or I'm going to bed!"

Danby sighed, stood up. He felt ashamed somehow as he walked over to where Miss Jones was sitting and felt for the little button behind her left ear. She regarded him calmly, her hands resting motionless on her lap, her breath coming and going rhythmically through her synthetic nostrils.

It was like committing murder. Danby shuddered as he returned to his viewchair. "You and your schoolteachers!" Laura said.

"Shut up!" Danby said.

He looked at the screen, tried to become interested in the play. It left him cold. The next program featured another play—a whodunit entitled *Macbeth*. That one left him cold, too. He kept glancing surreptitiously at Miss Jones. Her breast was still now, her eyes closed. The room seemed horribly empty.

Finally he couldn't stand it any longer. He stood up. "I'm going for a little ride," he told Laura, and walked out.

He backed the Baby B. out of the drivette and drove down the suburban street to the boulevard, asking himself over and over why

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an antique schoolteacher should affect him so. He knew it wasn't merely nostalgia, though nostalgia was part of it—nostalgia for September and realschool and walking into the classroom September mornings and seeing the teacher step out of her little closet by the blackboard the minute the bell rang and hearing her say, "Good morning, class. Isn't it a beautiful day for studying our lessons?"

But he'd never liked school any more than the other kids had, and he knew that September stood for something else besides books and autumn dreams. It stood for something he had lost somewhere along the line, something indefinable, something intangible; something he desperately needed now—

Danby wheeled the Baby B. down the boulevard, twisting in and around the scurrying automobilettes. When he turned down the side street that led to Friendly Fred's, he saw that there was a new stand going up on the corner. A big sign said: KING-SIZE CHARCOAL HOTS—HAVE A REAL HOT DOG GRILLED OVER A REAL FIRE! OPEN SOON!

He drove past, pulled into the parking lot beside Friendly Fred's, stepped out into the spring-starred night and let himself in by the side door. The place was crowded but he managed to find an empty stall. Inside, he slipped a quarter into the dispenser and dialed a beer.

He sipped it moodily when it emerged in its sweated paper cup. The stall was stuffy and smelt of its last occupant—a wino, Danby decided. He wondered briefly how it must have been in the old days when barroom privacy was unheard of and you had to stand elbow to elbow with the other patrons and everybody knew how much everybody else drank and how drunk everybody else got. Then his mind reverted to Miss Jones.

There was a small telescreen above the drink-dispenser, and beneath it were the words: GOT TROUBLES? TUNE IN FRIENDLY FRED, THE BARTENDER—HE'LL LISTEN TO YOUR WOES (*only 25¢ for 3 minutes*). Danby slipped a quarter in the coin slot. There was a little click and the quarter rattled in the coin return cup and Friendly Fred's recorded voice said, "Busy right now, pal. Be with you in a minute."

After a minute and another beer, Danby tried again. This time the two-way screen lit up and Friendly Fred's pink-jowled, cheerful face shimmered into focus. "Hi, George. How's it goin'?"

"Not too bad, Fred. Not *too* bad."

"But it could be better, eh?"

Danby nodded. "You guessed it, Fred. You guessed it." He looked down at the little bar where his beer sat all alone. "I . . . I bought a schoolteacher, Fred," he said.

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"A *schoolteacher!*"

"Well I admit it's a kind of odd thing to buy, but I thought maybe the kid might need a little help with his TV-lessons—boxtop tests are coming up pretty soon and you know how kids feel when they don't send in the right answers and can't win a prize. And then I thought she—this is a special schoolteacher, you understand, Fred—I thought she could help Laura around the house. Things like that . . ."

His voice trailed away as he raised his eyes to the screen. Friendly Fred was shaking his friendly face solemnly. His pink jowls waggled. Presently: "George, you listen to me. You get rid of that teacher. Y'hear me, George? Get rid of her. Those android teachers are just as bad as the real old-fashioned kind—the kind that really breathed, I mean. You know what, George? You won't believe this, but I know. They usta hit kids. That's right. Hit them—" There was a buzzing noise and the screen started to flicker. "Time's up, George. Want another quarter's worth?"

"No thanks," Danby said. He finished his beer and left.

Did *everybody* hate schoolteachers? And, if so, why didn't everybody hate teleteachers too?

Danby pondered the paradox all next day at work. Fifty years ago it had looked as though android teachers were going to solve the educational problem as effectively as reducing the size and price of the prestige-cars at the turn of the century had solved the economic problem. But while android teachers had certainly obviated the teacher shortage, they'd only pointed up the other aspect of the problems—the school shortage. What good did it do to have enough teachers when there weren't enough classrooms for them to teach in? And how could you appropriate enough money to build new schools when the country was in constant need of newer and better super-highways?

It was silly to say that the building of public schools should have priority over the building of public roads, because if you neglected the country's highways you automatically weakened the average citizen's penchant to buy new cars, thereby weakening the economy, precipitating a depression, and making the building of new schools more impracticable than it had been in the first place.

When you came right down to it, you had to take your hat off to the cereal companies. In introducing teleteachers and teleducation, they had saved the day. One teacher standing in one room, with a blackboard on one side of her and a movie-screen on the other, could hold classes for fifty million pupils, and if any of those pupils didn't like the way she taught all

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he had to do was switch channels to one of the other teleducational programs sponsored by one of the other cereal companies. (It was up to each pupil's parents, of course, to see that he didn't skip classes, or tune in on the next grade before he passed the previous grade's boxtop tests.)

But the best part of the whole ingenious system was the happy fact that the cereal companies paid for everything, thereby absolving the taxpayer of one of his most onerous obligations and leaving his pocketbook more amenable to salestax, gas tax, tolls, and carpayments. And all the cereal companies asked in return for their fine public service was that the pupils—and preferably the parents, too—eat their cereal.

So the paradox wasn't a paradox after all. A schoolteacher was an anathema because she symbolized expense; a teleteacher was a respected public servant because she symbolized the large economy-size package. But the difference, Danby knew, went much deeper.

While schoolteacher-hatred was partly atavistic, it was largely the result of the propaganda campaign the cereal companies had launched when first putting their idea into action. They were responsible for the widespread myth that android schoolteachers hit their pupils and they still revived that myth occasionally just in case there was anybody left who still doubted it.

The trouble was, most people were teleducated and therefore didn't know the truth. Danby was an exception. He'd been born in a small town, the mountainous location of which had made TV reception impossible, and before his family migrated to the city he'd attended realschool. So he *knew* that schoolteachers didn't hit their pupils.

Unless Androids, Inc. had distributed one or two deficient models by mistake. And that wasn't likely. Androids, Inc. was a pretty efficient corporation. Look at what excellent service station attendants they made. Look at what fine stenographers, waitresses, and maids they put on the market.

Of course neither the average man starting out in business nor the average householder could afford them. But—Danby's thoughts did an intricate hop, skip, and a jump—wasn't that all the more reason why Laura should be satisfied with a makeshift maid?

But she wasn't satisfied. All he had to do was take one look at her face when he came home that night and he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that she wasn't satisfied.

He had never seen her cheeks so pinched, her lips so thin. "Where's Miss Jones?" he asked.

"She's in her case," Laura said. "And tomorrow morning you're going to take her back to whoever you bought her from and get our

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forty-nine ninety-five refunded!"

"She's not going to hit *me* again!" Billy said from his Indian squat in front of the TV screen.

Danby whitened. "*Did* she hit him?"

"Well, not exactly," Laura said.

"Either she did or she didn't," Danby said.

"Tell him what she said about my TV-teacher!" Billy shouted.

"She said Billy's teacher wasn't qualified to teach horses."

"And tell him what she said about Hector and Achilles!"

Laura sniffed. "She said it was a shame to make a cowboy-and-Indian melodrama out of a classic like the *Iliad* and call it education."

The story came out gradually. Miss Jones apparently had gone on an intellectual rampage from the moment Laura had turned her on in the morning to the moment Laura had turned her off. According to Miss Jones, everything in the Danby household was wrong, from the teleducation programs Billy watched on the little red TV set in his room and the Morning and Afternoon programs Laura watched on the big TV set in the living room, to the pattern of the wallpaper in the hallway (little red Cadillettes rollicking along interlaced ribbons of highways), the windshield picture window in the kitchen, and the dearth of books.

"Can you imagine?" Laura said. "She actually thinks books are still being published!"

"All I want to know," Danby said, "is did she hit him?"

"I'm coming to that—"

About three o'clock, Miss Jones had been dusting in Billy's room. Billy was watching his lessons dutifully, sitting at his little desk as nice and quiet as you please, absorbed in the efforts of the cowboys to take the Indian village of Troy, when all of a sudden Miss Jones swept across the room like a mad woman, uttered her sacrilegious remark about the alteration of the *Iliad,* and turned off the set right in the middle of the lesson. That was when Billy had begun to scream and when Laura had burst into the room and found Miss Jones gripping his arm with one hand and raising her other hand to deliver the blow.

"I got there in the nick of time," Laura said. "There's no telling what she might have done. Why, she might have killed him!"

"I doubt it," Danby said. "What happened after that?"

"I grabbed Billy away from her and told her to go back to her case. Then I shut her off and closed the cover. And believe me, George Danby, it's going to stay closed! And like I said, tomorrow morning you're going to take her back—if you want Billy and me to go on living in this house!"

Danby felt sick all evening. He picked at his supper, languished through part of the Western Hour,

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glancing every now and then, when he was sure Laura wasn't looking, at the case standing mutely by the door. The heroine of the Western Hour was a dance hall girl—a 39-24-38 blonde named Antigone. Seemed that her two brothers had killed each other in a gun fight and the local sheriff—a character named Creon—had permitted only one of them a decent burial on Boot Hill, illogically insisting that the other be left out on the desert for the buzzards to pick at. Antigone couldn't see it that way at all, and she told her sister Ismene that if one brother rated a respectable grave, so did the other, and that she, Antigone, was going to see that he got one, and would Ismene please lend her a hand? But Ismene was chicken, so Antigone said All right, she'd take care of the matter herself; then an old prospector named Teiresias rode into town and—

Danby got up quietly, slipped into the kitchen, and let himself out the back door. He got behind the wheel and drove down to the boulevard, then up the boulevard, with all the windows open and the warm wind washing around him.

The hot dog stand on the corner was nearing completion. He glanced at it idly as he turned into the side street. There were a number of empty stalls at Friendly Fred's and he chose one at random. He had quite a few beers, standing there at the lonely little bar, and he did a lot of thinking. When he was sure his wife and son were in bed, he drove home, opened Miss Jones' case, and turned her on.

"Were you going to hit Billy this afternoon?" he asked.

The blue eyes regarded him unwaveringly, the lashes fluttering at rhythmic intervals, the pupils gradually adjusting themselves to the living room lamp Laura had left burning. Presently: "I'm incapable of striking a human, sir. I believe the clause is in my guarantee."

"I'm afraid your guarantee ran out some time ago, Miss Jones," Danby said. His voice felt thick and his words kept running together. "Not that it matters. You did grab his arm though, didn't you?"

"I had to, sir."

Danby frowned. He swayed a little, weaved back into the living room on rubbery legs. "Come over and sit down and tell me about it, Mish—Miss Jones," he said.

He watched her step out of her case and walk across the room. There was something odd about the way she walked. Her step was no longer light, but heavy; her body no longer delicately balanced, but awry. With a start, he realized that she was limping.

She sat down on the couch and he sat down beside her. "He kicked you, didn't he?" he said.

"Yes, sir. I had to hold him

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back or he'd have kicked me again."

There was a dull redness filling the room, coalescing before his eyes. Then, subtly, the redness dissipated before the dawning realization that here in his hand lay the very weapon he had needed: the psychological bludgeon with which he could quell all further objection to Miss Jones.

But a little of the redness still remained and it was permeated with regret. "I'm terribly sorry, Miss Jones. Billy's too aggressive, I'm afraid."

"He could hardly help being so, sir. I was quite astonished today when I learned that those horrid programs that he watches constitute his entire educational fare. His teleteacher is little more than a semi-civilized M.C. whose primary concern is selling his company's particular brand of corn flakes. I can understand now why your writers have to revert to the classics for ideas. Their creativity is snuffed out by clichés while still in its embryo-stage."

Danby was enchanted. He had never heard anyone talk that way before. It wasn't her words so much. It was the way she said them, the conviction that her voice carried despite the fact that her "voice" was no more than a deftly built speaker geared to tapes that were in turn geared to unimaginably intricate memory banks.

But sitting there beside her, watching her lips move, seeing her lashes descend ever so often over her blue blue eyes, it was as though September had come and sat in the room. Suddenly a feeling of utter peace engulfed him. The rich, mellow days of September filed one by one past his eyes and he saw why they were different from other days. They were different because they had depth and beauty and quietness; because their blue skies held promises of richer, mellower days to come—

They were different because they had *meaning*. . . .

The moment was so poignantly sweet that Danby never wanted it to end. The very thought of its passing racked him with unbearable agony and instinctively he did the only physical thing he could do to sustain it.

He put his arm around Miss Jones' shoulder.

She did not move. She sat there quietly, her breast rising and falling at even intervals, her long lashes drifting down now and again like dark, gentle birds winging over blue limpid waters—

"The play we watched last night," Danby said. "*Romeo and Juliet*—Why didn't you like it?"

"It was rather horrible, sir. It was a burlesque, really—tawdry, cheap, the beauty of the lines corrupted and obscured."

"Do you know the lines?"

"Some of them."

"Say them. Please."

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"Yes, sir. At the close of the balcony scene, when the two lovers are parting, Juliet says, *'Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow, That I shall say good night till it be morrow.'* And Romeo answers: *'Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast! Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest!'* Why did they leave that out, sir? Why?"

"Because we're living in a cheap world," Danby said, surprised at his sudden insight, "and in a cheap world, precious things are worthless. Shay—say the lines again please, Miss Jones."

"Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say good night till it be morrow—"

"Let me finish." Danby concentrated. *"Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace—"*

"—in thy breast—"

"Would I were sleep and peace, so—"

"—sweet—"

"—so sweet to rest!"

Abruptly Miss Jones stood up. "Good evening, madam," she said.

Danby didn't bother to get up. It wouldn't have done any good. He could see Laura well enough, anyway, from where he was sitting. Laura standing in the living room doorway in her new Cadillette pajamas and her bare feet that had made no sound in their surreptitious descent of the stairs. The two-dimensional cars that comprised the pajama pattern stood out in vermilion vividness and it was as though she was lying down and letting them run rampant over her body, letting them defile her breasts and her belly and her legs . . .

He saw her narrow face and her cold pitiless eyes and he knew it would be useless to try to explain, that she wouldn't—couldn't—understand. And he realized with sudden shocking clarity that in the world in which he lived September had been dead for decades, and he saw himself in the morning, loading the case into the Baby B. and driving down the glittering city streets to the little secondhand store and asking the proprietor for his money back and he saw himself afterwards, but he had to look away, and when he looked away he saw Miss Jones standing incongruously in the gaudy living room and heard her saying, over and over like a broken bewildered record, "Is something wrong, madam? Is something wrong?"

It was several weeks before Danby felt whole enough to go down to Friendly Fred's for a beer. Laura had begun speaking to him by then, and the world, while not quite the same as it had once been, had at least taken on some of the aspects of its former self. He backed the Baby B. out of the drivette and drove down the street and into the multicolored boulevard

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traffic. It was a clear June night and the stars were crystal pinpoints high above the fluorescent fire of the city. The hot dog stand on the corner was finished now, and open for business. Several customers were standing at the gleaming chrome counter and a waitress was turning sizzling wieners over a chrome charcoal brazier. There was something familiar about her gay rainfall of a dress, about the way she moved; about the way the gentle sunrise of her hair framed her gentle face— Her new owner was leaning on the counter some distance away, chatting with a customer.

There was a tightness in Danby's chest as he parked the Baby B. and got out and walked across the concrete apron to the counter —a tightness in his chest and a steady throbbing in his temples. There were some things you couldn't permit to happen without at least trying to stop them, no matter what the price for trying to stop them involved.

He had reached the section of the counter where the owner was standing and he was about to lean across the polished chrome and slap the smug fat face, when he saw the little cardboard sign propped against the chrome mustard jar, the sign that said, MAN WANTED. . . .

A hot dog-stand was a long way from being a September classroom, and a schoolteacher dispensing hot dogs could never quite compare to a schoolteacher dispensing dreams; but if you wanted something badly enough, you took whatever you could get of it, and were thankful for even that. . . .

"I could only work nights," Danby said to the owner. "Say from six to twelve—"

"Why, that would be fine," the owner said. "I'm afraid I won't be able to pay you much at first, though. You see, I'm just starting out and—"

"Never mind that," Danby said. "When do I start?"

"Why, the sooner the better."

Danby walked around to where a section of the counter raised up on hidden hinges and he stepped into the stand proper and took off his coat. If Laura didn't like the idea, she could go to hell, but he knew it would be all right because the additional money he'd be making would make *her* dream—the Cadillette one—come true.

He donned the apron the owner handed him and joined Miss Jones in front of the charcoal brazier. "Good evening, Miss Jones," he said. She turned her head and the blue eyes seemed to light up and her hair was like the sun coming up on a hazy September morning. "Good evening, sir," she said, and a September wind sprang up in the June night and blew through the stand and it was like going back to school again after an endless empty summer.

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Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937), who was lucky in so few things in this life, was at least fortunate after death in his literary executor. No one could have been more enthusiastically understanding of the corpus of Lovecraft's work than August Derleth; and no regiment could have labored so valiantly (and successfully), as critic, editor, publisher, biographer, bibliographer and collaborator-post-mortem, to obtain just recognition of H.P.L.'s place in American letters. The Lovecraft-Derleth "collaborations"—THE LURKER AT THE THRESHOLD *(Arkham, 1945),* THE SURVIVOR AND OTHERS *(Arkham, 1957)—are in essence Derleth's faithful elaborations of incomplete notes left by Lovecraft; but the one you are about to read is a little more. In this story the collaborator was inspired to introduce, as the protagonist of a projected Lovecraft story, the author himself. Shaping the figure lovingly from personal memory, strengthening it with excerpts from H.P.L.'s letters and other writings, Derleth has created something unique: a tale of the eery and arcane which is also warmly human.*

The Lamp of Alhazred

by H. P. LOVECRAFT AND AUGUST DERLETH

IT WAS SEVEN YEARS AFTER HIS GRANDfather Whipple's disappearance that Ward Phillips received the lamp. This, like the house on Angell Street where Phillips lived, had belonged to his grandfather. Phillips had had the living of the house ever since his grandfather's disappearance, but the lamp had been in the keeping of the old man's lawyer until the elapsing of the required seven years for the presumption of death. It had been his grandfather's wish that the lamp be safely kept by the lawyer in the event of any untoward circumstance, whether death or any other, so that Phillips should have sufficient time to browse as he pleased in the sizable Whipple library, in

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which a great store of learning waited for Phillips' attention. Once he had read through the many volumes on the shelves, Phillips would be mature enough to inherit his grandfather's "most priceless treasure"—as old Whipple himself had put it.

Phillips was then thirty, and in indifferent health, though this was but a continuation of the sickliness which had so often made his childhood miserable. He had been born into a moderately wealthy family, but the savings which had once been his grandfather's had been lost through injudicious investments, and all that remained to Phillips was the house on Angell Street and its contents. Phillips had become a writer for the pulp magazines, and had eked out a spare living by undertaking in addition the revision of countless almost hopeless manuscripts of prose and verse by writers far more amateur than he, who sent them to him, hopeful that through the miracle of his pen they in turn might see their work in print. His sedentary life had weakened his resistance to disease; he was tall, thin, wore glasses and was prey to colds and once, much to his embarrassment, he came down with the measles.

He was much given on warm days to wandering out into the country where he had played as a child, taking his work outdoors, where often he sat on the same lovely wooded riverbank which had been his favorite haunt since infancy. This Seekonk River shore had changed not at all in the years since then, and Phillips, who lived much in the past, believed that the way to defeat the sense of time was to cling close to unaltered early haunts. He explained his way of life to a correspondent by writing, "Amongst those forest paths I know so well, the gap between the present and the days of 1899 or 1900 vanishes utterly—so that sometimes I almost tend to be astonished upon emergence to find the city grown out of its *fin de siècle* semblance!" And, in addition to the Seekonk's banks, he went often to a hill, Nentaconhaunt, from the slope of which he could look down upon his native city and wait there for the sunset and the enchanting panoramas of the city springing to its life by night, with the steeples and gambrel roofs darkening upon the orange and crimson, or mother-of-pearl and emerald afterglow, and the lights winking on, one by one, making of the vast, sprawling city a magical land to which, more than to the city by day, Phillips fancied himself bound.

As a result of these diurnal excursions, Phillips worked far into the night, and the lamp, because he had long ago given up the use of electricity to conserve his meager income, would be of use to him, for all that it was of an odd shape and manifestly very old. The letter which came with this final gift

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from the old man, whose attachment to his grandson had been unbounded and was cemented by the early death of the boy's parents, explained that the lamp came from a tomb in Arabia of the dawn of history. It had once been the property of a certain half-mad Arab, known as Abdul Alhazred, and was a product of the fabulous tribe of Ad—one of the four mysterious, little-known tribes of Arabia, which were Ad of the south, Thamood of the north, Tasm and Jadis of the center of the peninsula. It had been found long ago in the hidden city called Irem, the City of Pillars, which had been erected by Shedad, last of the despots of Ad, and was known by some as the Nameless City, and said to be in the area of Hadramant, and, by others, to be buried under the ageless, ever-shifting sand of the Arabian deserts, invisible to the ordinary eye, but sometimes encountered by chance by the favorites of the Prophet. In concluding his long letter, old Whipple had written: "It may bring pleasure equally by being lit or by being left dark. It may bring pain on the same terms. It is the source of ecstasy or terror."

The lamp of Alhazred was unusual in its appearance. It was meant for burning oil, and seemed to be of gold. It had the shape of a small oblong pot, with a handle curved up from one side, and a spout for wick and flame on the other. Many curious drawings decorated it, together with letters and pictures arranged into words in a language unfamiliar to Phillips, who could draw upon his knowledge for more than one Arabian dialect, and yet knew not the language of the inscription on the lamp. Nor was it Sanskrit which was inscribed upon the metal, but a language older than that—one of letters and hieroglyphs, some of which were pictographs. Phillips worked all one afternoon to polish it, inside and out, after which he filled it with oil.

That night, putting aside the candles and the kerosene lamp by the light of which he had worked for many years, he lit the lamp of Alhazred. He was mildly astonished at the warmth of its glow, the steadiness of its flame, and the quality of its light, but, since he was behind in his work, he did not stop to ponder these things, but bent at once to the task in hand, which was the revision of a lengthy creation in verse, which began in this manner:

"Oh, 'twas on a bright and early
morn
Of a year long 'fore I was born,
While earth was yet being torn,
Long before by strife 'twas worn
. . ."

and went on even more archaically in a style long ago out of fashion. Ordinarily, however, the archaic appealed to Phillips. He lived so definitely in the past that he had pro-

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nounced views, and a philosophy all his own about the influence of the past. He had an idea of impersonal pageantry and time-and-space-defying fantasy which had always from his earliest consciousness been so inextricably bound up with his inmost thought and feeling that any searching transcript of his moods would sound highly artificial, exotic, and flavored with conventional images, no matter how utterly faithful it might be to truth. What had haunted Phillips' dreams for decades was a strange sense of adventurous expectancy connected with landscapes and architecture and sky-effects. Always in his mind was a picture of himself at three, looking across and downward from a railway bridge at the densest part of the city, feeling the imminence of some wonder which he could neither describe nor fully conceive —a sense of marvel and liberation hiding in obscure dimensions and problematically reachable at rare instances still through vistas of ancient streets, across leagues of hill country, or up endless flights of marble steps culminating in tiers of balustraded terraces. But, however much Phillips was inclined to retreat to a time when the world was younger and less hurried, to the eighteenth century or even farther back, when there was still time for the art of conversation, and when a man might dress with a certain elegance and not be looked at askance by his neighbors, the lack of invention in the lines over which he struggled, and the paucity of ideas, together with his own weariness, soon combined to tire him to such an extent that he found it impossible to continue, and, recognizing that he could not do justice to these uninspired lines, he pushed them away at last and leaned back to rest.

Then it was that he saw that a subtle change had come upon his surroundings.

The familiar walls of books, broken here and there by windows, over which Phillips was in the habit of drawing the curtains tight so that no light from outside—of sun or moon or even of the stars—invaded his sanctuary, were strangely overlaid not only with the light of the lamp from Arabia, but also by certain objects and vistas in that light. Wherever the light fell, there, superimposed upon the books on their serried shelves, were such scenes as Phillips could not have conjured up in the wildest recesses of his imagination. But where there were shadows—as, for instance, where the shadow of the back of a chair was thrown by the light upon the shelves—there was nothing but the darkness of the shadow and the dimness of the book on the shelves in that darkness.

Phillips sat in wonder and looked at the scenes unfolded before him. He thought fleetingly that he was the victim of a curious optical illusion, but he did not long entertain this explanation of what

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he saw. Nor, curiously, was he in want of an explanation; he felt no need of it. A marvel had come to pass, and he looked upon it with but a passing question, only the wonder of what he saw. For the world upon which he looked in the light of the lamp was one of great and surpassing strangeness. It was like nothing he had ever seen before, nor like anything he had read or dreamed about.

It seemed to be a scene of the earth when young, one in which the land was still in the process of being formed, a land where great gouts of steam came from fissures and rocks, and the trails of serpentine animals showed plainly in the mud. High overhead flew great beasts that fought and tore, and from an opening in a rock on the edge of a sea, a tremendous animal appendage, resembling a tentacle, uncoiled sinuously and menacingly into the red, wan sunlight of that day, like a creature from some fantastic fiction.

Then, slowly, the scene changed. The rocks gave way to wind-swept desert, and, like a mirage, rose the deserted and hidden city, the lost City of the Pillars, fabled Irem, and Phillips knew that, while no human foot any longer walked the streets of that city, certain terrible beings still lurked among the ancient stone piles of the dwellings, which stood not in ruins, but as they had been built, before the people of that ancient city had been destroyed or driven forth by the things which came out of the heavens to lay siege to and possess Irem. Yet nothing was to be seen of them; there was only the lurking fear of a movement, like a shadow out of time. And far beyond the city and the desert rose the snow-capped mountains; even as he looked upon them, names for them sprang into his thoughts. The city on the desert was the Nameless City and the snowy peaks were the Mountains of Madness or perhaps Kadath in the Cold Waste. And he enjoyed keenly bestowing names upon these landscapes, for they came to him with ease, they sprang to his mind as if they had always been lingering on the perimeter of his thoughts, waiting for this moment to come to being.

He sat for a long time, his fascination unbounded, but presently a vague feeling of alarm began to stir in him. The landscapes passing before his eyes were no less of the quality of dreams, but there was a disquieting persistence of the malign, together with unmistakable hints of horrible entities which inhabited those landscapes; so that finally he put out the light and somewhat shakily lit a candle, and was comforted by its wan, familiar glow.

He pondered long on what he had seen. His grandfather had called the lamp his "most priceless possession"; its properties must then have been known to him.

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And what were its properties but an ancestral memory and a magic gift of revelation so that he who sat in its glow was enabled to see in turn the places of beauty and terror its owners had known? What Phillips had seen, he was convinced, were landscapes known to Alhazred. But how inadequate this explanation was! And how perplexed Phillips grew, the more he thought of what he had seen! He turned at last to the work he had put aside and lost himself in it, pushing back from his awareness all the fancies and alarms which clamored for recognition.

Late next day, Phillips went out into the October sunlight, away from the city. He took the car-line to the edge of the residential district and then struck out into the country. He penetrated a terrain which took him almost a mile from any spot he had ever before trod in the course of his life, following a road which branched north and west from the Plainfield Pike and ascending a low rise which skirted Nentaconhaunt's western foot, and which commanded an utterly idyllic vista of rolling meadows, ancient stone walls, hoary groves, and distant cottage roofs to the west and south. He was less than three miles from the heart of the city, and yet basked in the primal rural New England of the first colonists.

Just before sunset, he climbed the hill by a precipitous cartpath bordering an old wood, and from the dizzy crest obtained an almost stupefying prospect of outspread countryside, gleaming rivulets, far-off forests, and mystical orange sky, with the great solar disc sinking redly amidst bars of stratus clouds. Entering the woods, he saw the actual sunset through the trees, and then turned east to cross the hill to a more familiar cityward slope which he had always sought. Never before had he realized the great extent of Nentaconhaunt's surface. It was in reality a miniature plateau or table-land, with valleys, ridges, and summits of its own, rather than a simple hill. From some of the hidden interior meadows—remote from every sign of nearby human life—he secured truly marvelous glimpses of the remote urban skyline—a dream of enchanted pinnacles and domes half-floating in air, and with an obscure aura of mystery around them. The upper windows of some of the taller towers held the fire of the sun after he had lost it, affording a spectacle of cryptic and curious glamor. Then he saw the great round disc of the Hunter's moon floating about the belfries and minarets, while in the orange-glowing west Venus and Jupiter commenced to twinkle. His route across the plateau was varied—sometimes through the interior—sometimes getting toward the wooded edge where dark valleys sloped down to the plain below, and huge balanced boulders on

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rocky heights imparted a spectral, druidic effect where they stood out against the twilight.

He came finally to better-known ground, where the grassy ridge of an old buried aqueduct gave the illusion of a vestigial Roman road, and stood once more on the familiar eastward crest which he had known ever since his earliest childhood. Before him, the outspread city was rapidly lighting up, and lay like a constellation in the deepening dusk. The moon poured down increasing floods of pale gold, and the glow of Venus and Jupiter in the fading west had grown intense. The way home lay before him down a steep hillside to the car-line which would take him back to the prosaic haunts of man.

But throughout all these halcyon hours, Phillips had not once forgotten his experience of the night before, and he could not deny that he looked upon the coming of darkness with an increased anticipation. The vague alarm which had stirred him had subsided in the promise of further nocturnal adventure of a nature hitherto unknown to him.

He ate his solitary supper that night in haste so that he could go early to his study where the rows of books that reached to the ceiling greeted him with their bland assurance of permanence. This night he did not even glance at the work which awaited him, but lit the lamp of Alhazred at once. Then he sat to wait for whatever might happen.

The soft glow of the lamp spread yellowly outward to the shelf-girt walls. It did not flicker; the flame burned steadily, and, as before, the first impression Phillips received was one of comforting, lulling warmth. Then, slowly, the books and the shelves seemed to grow dim, to fade, and gave way to the scenes of another world and time.

For hour upon hour that night Phillips watched. And he named the scenes and places he saw, drawing upon a hitherto unopened vein of his imagination, stimulated by the glow from the lamp of Alhazred. He saw a dwelling of great beauty, wreathed in vapors, on a headland like that near Gloucester, and he called it the strange high house in the mist. He saw an ancient, gambrel-roofed town, with a dark river flowing through it, a town like to Salem, but more eldritch and uncanny, and he called the town Arkham, and the river Miskatonic. He saw the dark brooding sea-coast town of Innsmouth, and Devil Reef beyond it. He saw the watery depths of R'lyeh where dead Cthulhu lay sleeping. He looked upon the windswept Plateau of Leng, and the dark islands of the South Seas—the places of dream, the landscapes of other places, of outer space, the levels of being that existed in other time continua, and were older than earth itself, tracing back through

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the Ancient Ones to Hali in the start and even beyond.

But he witnessed these scenes as through a window or a door which seemed to beckon him invitingly to leave his own mundane world and journey into these realms of magic and wonder; and the temptation rose ever stronger within him, he trembled with a longing to obey, to discard that which he had become and chance that which he might be; and, as before, he darkened the lamp and welcomed the book-lined walls of his Grandfather Whipple's study.

And for the rest of that night, by candlelight, abandoning the monotonous revisions he had planned to do, he turned instead to the writing of short tales, in which he called up the scenes and beings he had seen by the light of the lamp of Alhazred.

All that night he wrote, and all the next day he slept, exhausted.

And the following night, once again he wrote, though he took time to answer letters from his correspondents, to whom he wrote of his "dreams," unknowing whether he had seen the visions that had passed before his eyes or whether he had dreamed them, and aware that the worlds of his fiction had been woven inextricably with those which belonged to the lamp, having blended in his mind's eye the desires and yearnings of his youth with the visions of his creative drive, absorbing alike the places of the lamp and the secret recesses of his heart, which, like the lamp of Alhazred, had coursed the far reaches of the universes.

For many nights Phillips did not light the lamp.

The nights lengthened into months, the months into years.

He grew older, and his fictions found their way into print, and the myths of Cthulhu; of Hastur the Unspeakable; of Yog-Sothoth; and Shub-Niggurath, the Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young; of Hypnos, the god of sleep; of the Great Old Ones and their messenger, who was Nyarlathotep—all became part of the lore of Phillips' innermost being, and of the shadow-world beyond. He brought Arkham into reality, and delineated the strange high house in the midst; he wrote of the shadow over Innsmouth and the whisperer in darkness and the fungi from Yuggoth and the horror at Dunwich; and in his prose and verse the light from the lamp of Alhazred shone brightly, even though Phillips no longer used the lamp.

Sixteen years passed in this fashion, and then one night Ward Phillips came upon the lamp where he had put it, behind a row of books on one of the lowermost shelves of his Grandfather Whipple's library. He took it out, and at once all the old enchantment and wonder were upon him, and he polished it anew and set it once

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more on his table. In the long years which had passed, Phillips had grown progressively weaker. He was now mortally ill, and knew that his years were numbered; and he wanted to see again the worlds of beauty and terror that lay within the glow of the lamp of Alhazred.

He lit the lamp once more and looked to the walls.

But a strange thing came to pass. Where before there had been on the walls the places and beings of Alhazred's adventures, there now came to be a magical presentation of a country intimately known to Ward Phillips—but not to his time, rather of a time gone by, a dear lost time, when he had romped through his childhood playing his imaginative games of Greek mythology along the banks of the Seekonk. For there, once again, were the glades of childhood; there were the familiar coves and inlets where he had spent his tender years; there was once more the bower he had built in homage to great Pan; and all the irresponsibility, the happy freedoms of that childhood lay upon those walls; for the lamp now gave back his own memory. And he thought eagerly that perhaps it had always given him an ancestral memory, for who could deny that perhaps in the days of his Grandfather Whipple's youth, or the youth of those who had gone before him, someone in Ward Phillips' line had seen the places illuminated by the lamp?

And once again it was as if he saw as through a door. The scene invited him, and he stumbled weakly to his feet.

He hesitated only for a moment; then he strode toward the books.

The sunlight burst suddenly all about him. He felt shorn of his shackles, and he began to run lithely along the shore of the Seekonk to where, ahead of him, the scenes of his childhood waited and he could renew himself, beginning again, living once more the halcyon time when all the world was young. . . .

It was not until a curious admirer of his tales came to the city to visit him that Ward Phillips' disappearance was discovered. It was assumed that he had wandered away into the woods, and been taken ill and died there, for his solitary habits were well known in the Angell Street neighborhood, and his steady decline in health was no secret.

Though desultory searching parties were organized and sent out to scour the vicinity of Nentaconhaunt and the shores of the Seekonk, there was no trace of Ward Phillips. The police were confident that his remains would some day be found, but nothing was discovered, and in time the unsolved mystery was lost in the police and newspaper files.

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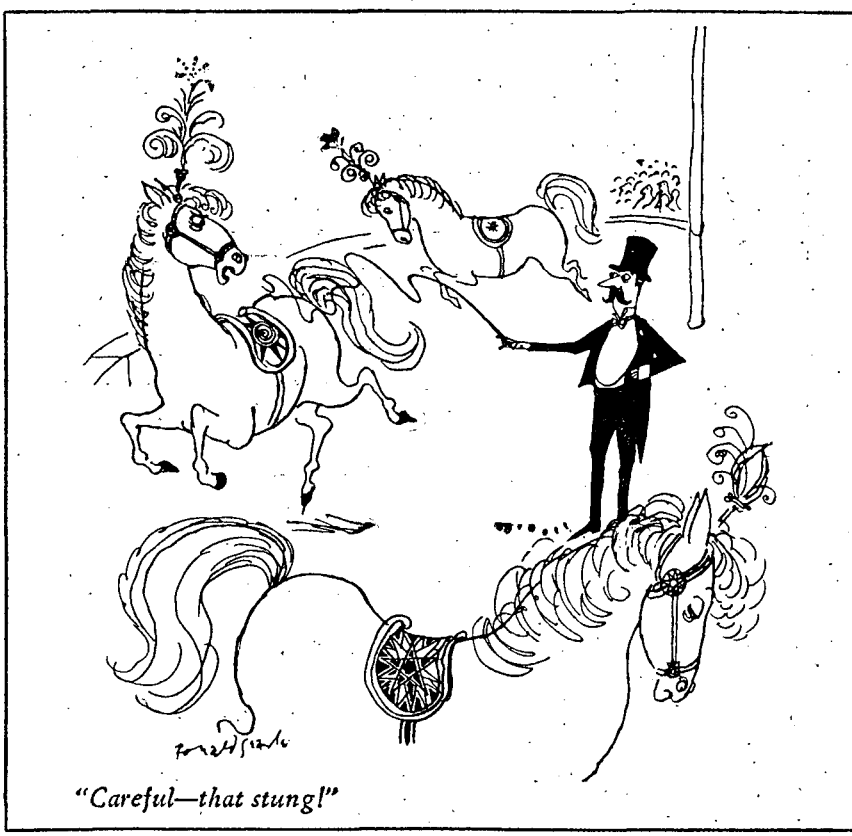
The years passed. The old house on Angell Street was torn down, the library was bought up by book shops, and the contents of the house were sold for junk—including an old-fashioned antique Arabian lamp, for which no one in the aseptic technological world past Ward Phillips' time could devise any use.



The cartoon above by Ronald Searle, appeared in his collection, "The Female Approach," © 1954 by Ronald Searle. Mr. Searle appears regularly in "Punch".

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Almost twenty years ago, in one of the great pioneering s.f. articles, L. Sprague de Camp studied the problems of Language for Time Travelers (Astounding, *July, 1938; reprinted in* COMING ATTRACTIONS, *edited by Martin Greenberg, Gnome, 1957). Since then a few authors—notably Poul Anderson, John Dickson Carr and Mr. de Camp himself—have made strikingly effective use of linguistics in fiction; but errors and confusion persist, and linguistic accuracy or plausibility remains a rarity in our field. Now, after two decades of further study and research on his own part and of advances in the science of linguistics itself, de Camp returns to the theme, to look more deeply into the nature of language as it affects future probabilities, and to give readers (and, one dares hope, writers) a lively new understanding of*

How to Talk Futurian

by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

HECTOR S. HERO GETS DOWN FROM his time machine, or climbs out of the vacuum bottle in which he has been preserved, alive but inert, for hundreds of years. And right away he runs spang into the language-barrier.

Sometimes he finds the futurians talking a modified English:

> "F'm Selui, he say," said a man's voice. "Longo, too."
>
> "Eah," said another. "'S lucky to live—lucky. 'L be rich."
>
> (Stanley G. Weinbaum, *The Black Flame*)

Or, again:

> "Taak it aisy, no," said the stranger soothingly. "Are shock, I knuw. But du are mung towarishes no."
>
> (Poul Anderson, *Time Heals*)

Perhaps they speak an international jargon or pidgin:

> The youth qualified his question. "*Ye kleidis novae en sagis novate. Whur iccidi hist?*"
>
> (Philip K. Dick, *Time Pawn*)

Or Esperanto:

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"*Glorm,*" said the dark man, gasping, "*ne estis mia kulpo. Li—*"

Glorm said, "*Fermu vian truon.*"

(Damon Knight, *You're Another*)

Or, sometimes, things have changed so much that Hector Hero can make nothing of the language and must learn it from the ground up:

. . . Then he turned to the two others who were following him and spoke to them in a strange and very sweet and liquid tongue.

(H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*)

For the woman spoke in no language Schwartz had ever heard.

(Isaac Asimov, *Pebble in the Sky*)

Sometimes, even when the language is plain English, Hector finds the spelling changed. Here's a very unscientific example:

"Fr exarmpl, a riter ov th time, naimd Max Beerbohm, hoo woz stil alive in th twentieth cenchri, rote a stauri in wich e pautraid an imajnari karrakter kauld 'Enoch Soames'—a thurdrate poit hoo beleevz imself a grate jeeneus an maix a bargain with th Devvl in auder ter no wot posterriti thinx ov im! . . ."

(Max Beerbohm, *Enoch Soames*)

This can hardly be understood by one who does not speak Southern British dialect. Any amateur spelling-reformer could do better. For instance:

. . . a small green door bearing the words KIIP AUT . . .

(L. Sprague de Camp, *The Continent Makers*)

Anyone planning a foray into the future had better give thought to the problem of speech. If you're going to Iran you can learn Persian, but there is no grammar of Futurian. You must guess what you might run into, and there are few more helpless feelings than being stuck in a land where you can't talk to anybody.

Well, when Hector arrives, what *will* people speak? How can the time-traveler get ready to cope with the language-problem? What can the story-writer take for granted about Futurian?

First, is the world soon likely to take to one language instead of the two thousand it now speaks? (This number is arbitrary because in many cases it's a matter of choice—whether two forms of speech shall be deemed distinct languages or dialects of the same language.)

The answer is no. On the other hand, the number of living languages is getting less. This sounds as if I were contradicting myself.

The explanation is that the dying languages are little tribal tongues

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like Modoc and Klikatat. On the other hand, wherever enough people speak a language to give them a feeling that they are an important group with their own national destiny, they try to keep up their speech and get others to speak it. This is part of the cult of nationalism. If the language has no literature, they try to give it one. If it has faults or queernesses that make it hard, these are prized as cultural heritages to be defended to the death. Where nationalistic groups have no distinct speech of their own, they try to get one if they have to invent it or bring it back from the tomb.

Thus the Boers of South Africa try to convince the world that their Dutch dialect, Afrikaans, is a language in its own right. They refuse to speak or read English even when they know how, though Afrikaans has a negligible literature. A Boer said to a correspondent:

"How terrible it must be for you Americans, not to have a language of your own!"

Haitian Creole, an offshoot of French, is going through the same process of becoming a separate language. And the Zionist Jews in Palestine, before it became Israel, made a living language of Hebrew, which a century ago was practically extinct save as a sacred churchly speech like Latin in the Roman Catholic Church or Sumerian in Babylonia.

In Norway, a century and a half ago, there was no national language. Scandinavia spoke many local dialects shading into one another without heeding national boundaries. The ruling classes spoke two literary languages: Swedish in Sweden and Danish in Denmark and (with a distinctive accent) in Norway. When they came under the spell of nationalism, Norwegians decided they must have their own language. They have quarreled ever since over its form: whether it should be one local dialect or another, or a mixture. They have even tried to purge it of Danish influence, which is a little like purging English, a tongue of German origin, of Germanic influence.

When the Irish Free State began in the 1920's, its government tried to revive Irish Gaelic. This is a musical tongue with an involved grammar and an eccentric system of spelling. But they started too late. The only natural Gaelic-speakers were a half-million peasants and fishermen, one-sixth of the people in the Free State, dwelling along the west coast. But Gaelic-speakers continue to give up Gaelic and take to English. The children of the rest of the Irish Republic learn Gaelic in school, but in the same spirit in which American children learn French, and probably forget it as fast.

Another way in which people come to speak alike is the suppression of local dialects within one

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language-area; or, to be more exact, within the population that talks one language. Let us call such a group of people a *glossa*. As a result of education, travel, and electrical means like radios for reproducing speech, people in one glossa tend to sound more and more alike. It may take centuries till all the variations are flattened out in glossas so huge as the English or Spanish. But there is reason to think that American soldiers, for instance, tend to lose extreme features of their local dialects during their service.

Besides these forces, there are several languages which other people try to learn because they are so widely spoken as to be useful. One of course is English, spoken by many people in North America whose native tongues are French, Spanish, or an American Indian language. It is also used by the ruling caste of American-descended Negroes in Liberia, and in many other parts of the world. French is widely used as a second language in Europe, Latin America, and the Arabic-speaking countries. Spanish is not only spoken in most of the Latin-American countries but also is learned by American Indians in those countries as a second language. Other languages with a position like this are Russian, Hindi, and the Chinese *Gwan Hwa* or Official Dialect. These are international or supranational languages in the same sense that Latin was in the Roman Empire and medieval Europe.

Is any of these becoming a world-language? Not today. There are five would-be world-languages: Chinese, English, Hindi, Russian, and Spanish, each with a hundred million speakers or more. English has about 270,000,000; Russian 170,000,000; Spanish 100,000,000. There are no exact figures for the others. China has a half-billion people, but only a fraction use the *Gwan Hwa*.

French, long the speech of culture and diplomacy, and German, once the leading language of science, have been losing ground ever since European rule over the rest of the world began to decline in the Hitlerian War. Russian on the other hand is rising in influence.

Of the five leading supranational languages, all are being spoken by more and more people. Not only are their native speakers increasing along with the rest of the world's population, which is doubling every half-century; but they are also increasing in proportion to the whole as they are urged or forced upon people of other tongues.

Even so, English only enrols 11% of the world, and its use is not increasing everywhere. While it is taking the place of Dutch in Indonesia, it is losing ground in India. Though English was long the second language of the native élite in India, the Indian government is trying to get Hindi used

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throughout the nation. India speaks over 200 languages, but Hindi is the largest of these with about 130,000,000 to 150,000,000 speakers and so is logically being made the national language. But this means letting English go, as there are not enough schools in India to teach millions not only a second language but also a third.

So (not counting French and German) there are five supranational languages, none used by more than one-ninth of mankind. Whether they get bigger or smaller depends on matters of politics and economics. When a nation becomes mighty or carries on a world-wide trade, people of other glossas will learn its speech because it pays them to do so. But political and economic conditions change much faster than the language-map of the world, and no nation has ever lasted long enough for its speech to become truly world-wide.

Therefore we may look forward to seeing, for hundreds of years, a competing group of supranational languages rising and sinking with the fortunes of their native lands.

So don't be surprised, when you crawl out of your vacuum-jug in 2956, to find that the leading world-speeches are Swahili, Polish, and Melanesian Pidgin.

Are people getting more adept in use of languages other than their own—more polyglot, so Hector can quickly find someone to understand him?

In general, no. Perhaps in lands where education is being greatly expanded, more people are exposed to foreign languages than used to be the case. But there is reason to think that those who speak supranational tongues to begin with take less trouble to learn any other language. People who get up international meetings complain that they get more and more delegates who speak one language only, especially from the U.S.A.

This does not mean such delegates are lazy or stupid. If you are a Basque or a Wend, you have to learn foreign languages to get anywhere in life. But if your tongue is English or Spanish, you can travel vast distances, covering whole continents, without once getting into a fix where you have to know another tongue. So why learn? Languages are hard for most folk and, once learned, have to be practiced if they are not to rust away.

Organizing an international conference is quite a problem because of the language-barriers. If you restrict the speeches to one language (usually French) some delegates say they are gagged. If you allow a wide choice, others complain they can't understand papers in Hungarian and Bengali. Each wants his own language made official but doesn't want to speak or listen to any other.

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Many conferences make English, French, and German official, though this does not please the Italians and the Spanish-speakers or the ever more numerous Asians. The recent International Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy at Geneva used English, French, Spanish, and Russian. Translation takes time and money and makes things slow and dull.

The best solution is the Filene-Finlay system of translating at the same time into several languages and sending the translations over wires, with earphones and a selector-switch for each delegate. Edward A. Filene, the famous Bostonian merchant, proposed the system and put up money for it in 1925. Professor Gordon-Finlay of Britain worked it out, and it was used in the International Labor Conferences at Geneva, as it now is in the United Nations. But small organizations may not be able to afford the machinery and expert translators.

Suppose that some day we get a real world-state. Would that bring about the reign of one world-tongue?

That depends. If one nation conquered the world, it might try to impose its speech everywhere, as Latin was imposed on the Roman Empire and Arabic on the Caliphate. It might try to suppress other languages. Other imperial nations have tried this, but it takes many centuries, longer than most empires last. Under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Hungarians tried to force Magyar on the millions of Slovaks, Ukrainians, Rômanians, and Croats in the Kingdom of Hungary—whose official language was Latin! They got nowhere, partly because Magyar is not an Indo-European tongue and so is very hard for most Europeans to learn.

If the world-state were a voluntary federation, like the United Nations but with more power, the people of various glossas would cling to their own tongues as they do now in states like Belgium and Switzerland where two or three languages are official. The fact that a language is the speech of a minority (like French in Canada) gives its speakers a persecution-complex that makes them stick all the more stubbornly to their language.

How about hybrid languages? Could the supranational speeches merge into one?

Not in the usual sense. Two languages side by side may affect each other, but they stay separate. People borrow words from their conquerors, subjects, or neighbors, but keep their own syntax. Thus English keeps a Teutonic syntax with a half-French vocabulary, while Rômanian has a Latin syntax on which has been hung a largely Slavic vocabulary. But English and French stay separate, nor has

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Rômanian merged with Bulgarian or Serbo-Croatian.

How about synthetic languages?

Ever since Delgarno wrote *Ars Signorum* in 1661, thinkers have made up languages which they hoped would be so simple and regular that everybody would learn them. All natural languages seem to have hard features: the spelling and irregular verbs of English, the ideographs of Chinese, and so on. But, contrary to what you sometimes hear, there is no big difference among languages in how well they express themselves. Except where some lack the technical terms of the scientific age, you can pretty well say what you mean in any language if you know it well enough.

The world-language idea first really took hold when Johann Schleyer, an Austrian Catholic bishop, brought out Volapük in 1880. This synthetic speech was based mainly on English and German roots with complicated inflections. The Volapük movement held three conferences and in 1889 claimed a million members—probably an exaggeration.

Volapük soon collapsed when Ludwig L. Zamenhof of Warsaw announced a better world-speech, Esperanto, in 1887. This was mostly based on French and German roots. Zamenhof, a Polish Jew, was a man of fair learning and high ideals but not a scientific linguist. He thought a world-language would help prevent war. Of course having one language has not stopped the Russians, Spaniards, and Americans from fighting bloody civil wars in the past century, while the trilingual Swiss have been at peace. Still, there is something to Zamenhof's idea. Therefore organized pacifists have long supported Esperanto.

Being an amateur in linguistics, Zamenhof made some big blunders. He gave his nouns an unneeded inflection: the accusative case, formed by adding *-n*. His Slavic background led him to give Esperanto no indefinite article ("a, an") while it has clusters of consonants like [ksts] that would baffle many non-Slavs.* It is cluttered with diacritical marks which cannot be reproduced by any non-Esperantist printer. With a litle care he could have avoided these and still had a phonetic spelling.

When people began to see the faults of Esperanto, some tried to do better. They led heretical offshoots of the Esperantist movement, each with its own language: Ido, Antido, Nov-Esperanto, Occidental, and so on. Despite the good points of some of these languages, Esperanto stays out in front with half a million supporters. The improved synthetic tongues are to Esperanto what Es-

** Roman letters between brackets mean sounds; italics mean written or printed characters.*

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peranto is to natural languages. Having gone to a lot of trouble to learn Esperanto, its devotees won't drop it for yet another synthetic speech unless everybody else does first. That is much how ordinary people, when they think about the matter at all, feel about Esperanto.

Two big competitors of Esperanto have, however, arisen. One is Interlingua or Latin without inflections. This was invented in 1903 by Professor Giuseppe Peano, who later became director of the international-language academy founded by Monsignor Schleyer. If you know any Romance language, you can read Interlingua at sight, which cannot be said for Esperanto.

The other is C. K. Ogden's Basic English (1930). This is English stripped down to 850 words, not counting technical terms. Ogden does this by throwing out all but eighteen verbs ("come," "get," "give," etcetera) and making these, with compounds like "make use of," do duty for the rest. Ogden puts up with the conventional spelling of English.

As a result of these schisms, members of the various clans of the world-language movement denounced one another with all the venom of factious man—the very thing Zamenhof wanted to cure. Later they got more friendly and held conferences among the various groups. Naturally, each group praises its own language and passes over its faults.

My own suggestion is that somebody work up a Basic Spanish with a drastically simplified verb-system. Spanish is a nice regular language with a simple sound-system and would be easy but for its vast sea of verb-forms—116 per verb.

What are the chances that one of these synthetic languages will become a true world-speech?

Poor. Such a language faces the same obstruction as other reforms, as in spelling, the calendar, and weights and measures. You must make millions put up with expense and bother for a long-term gain. The change won't come slowly because, until millions have adopted it, it won't begin to pay off. Therefore there won't be the incentive to make enough people try it of their own free will.

The sad fact is that most adults are poor linguists who hate to study anything. If they learn any foreign tongue, they want one they are likely to use; that is, one of the supranational languages. When one has learned Esperanto, one can speak only to one's half-million fellow-Esperantists, compared with eighty million German-speakers, for instance. You might as well learn Estonian.

Some international societies have tried Esperanto and given it up because they found that not enough people would study the language

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before their meetings. The psychologist E. L. Thorndike found by tests that people can learn any good synthetic language faster than any common natural language, but that doesn't make Esperanto or Interlingua really easy. Any language, real or artificial, takes hundreds of hours of study and drill before you have really mastered it.

For centuries, then, we must resign ourselves to hundreds of languages, some from time to time rising to supranational tongues. Perhaps in a thousand years the world will agree on one universal speech. It might be English or any other leading language of today, or it might be one that nobody now would think of.

Well then, let's see how these supranational languages will be spoken and written. As a practical matter I will deal with English, but the principles apply to other languages too.

Languages change. They change in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and systems of writing or *orthography*.

It's hard to tell what will happen to our vocabulary. Benjamin Franklin would be baffled by many of the words in an average modern newspaper story. At the same time old words drop out of the language, because the things they refer to go out of use (like "hacqueton" and "codpiece") or because of fads and tabus (like dropping "thou" for "you" as more polite) or for goodness knows what reason.

New concepts need new words. Sometimes we invent one (like "gas" or "smog") or make one up out of Classical roots (like "sulfanilamide" or "geosyncline") or borrow one from a living language (like "yogurt" or "mambo"). Often we load the new meaning on the back of some poor English word, so that "short" becomes a noun meaning a short circuit, story, movie, shot, trouser, board, fish, count, seller, syllable, and several other things besides.

Slang contributes new words now and then, though at any one time most of the host of slang terms in use are doomed to die out without leaving a trace. Who remembers the Victorian slang expression "Walker!" meaning "Are you kidding?" It occurs in Dickens' *Christmas Carol*. But a few slang terms like "mob" (from *mobile vulgus*) are used so long that few recall their uncouth origin.

In grammar, we can trace one change that has affected the Indo-European languages from ancient times. The parent-language of this group was spoken somewhere in Central Asia in the third millennium B.C. by a wandering tribe of cattle-raisers who spread out, conquering as they went, until their rovings took them from Portugal

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to Assam. They were probably the first horsemen and hence could subdue more civilized folk and force their speech upon them. Those who swept into Iran and India called themselves *Arya,* "nobles," whence the abused term "Aryan."

The original Indo-European language must have been highly inflected. But, ever since the great migrations, the languages of this group have been losing inflections and coming closer to languages of the analytic-isolating type, like Chinese. In an analytic language a word always keeps the same form. It expresses changes in meaning by other words or by changing the order of the words in a sentence. When I say "I sing, I sang," I show the difference in tense by inflection, but if I say "I sing, I did sing," I do the same thing analytically.

English has carried this process as far as any Indo-European tongue. These languages also have a tendency to make the remaining inflections all alike. Thus where Anglo-Saxon or Old English had six declensions of nouns, English has reduced its nouns to one "regular" form (based on the strong masculine declension of Anglo-Saxon, which formed the nominative plural in *-as*) like "cat-cats," with some irregulars left over from Anglo-Saxon (man-men, mouse-mice, sheep-sheep). The Romance languages have done the same.

The "irregular" forms of nouns and verbs would probably be gotten rid of by the children's habit of making up the inflected forms of words they do not know just like those they do. But education has slowed down this process. A child who says "mans" or "goed" for "men" or "went" is quickly "corrected." So we may still be stuck with irregulars a thousand years hence. But the general trend is to get rid of most inflections and the irregularities of those that are left.

You already have some idea of how pronunciation changes. When a word comes down through several languages, the change may be out of all recognition. Look at these: Eboracum-York, Konstantinopolis-Istanbul, Benedictus-Bennett, Augustinus-Austin, Thiudareiks-Dietrich-Dirk, Darayavaush-Darius-Dara.

Laziness, the true mother of invention, is also the mother of changes in speech-sounds. People hurry from one sound to the next without distinguishing sharply between them. Children grow up using the bobbed and twisted forms of words they learned in babyhood. Men make feeble, fumbling tries at foreign words, like the English "Leghorn" for "Livorno."

I can't go into all the processes that work on spoken words, as that would mean a treatise on historical phonetics. But here are a

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few of the processes with a sample from present-day English to illustrate each:

Syncope: "prob'ly."
Apocope: "commish."
Apheresis: " 'possum."
Metathesis: "hunderd."
Dissimilation: "Febewary."
Assimilation: "horsh-shoe."
Analogy: "stupenjous."
Folk-etymology: "sparrow-grass" (asparagus).

Assimilation, letting a sound affect the quality of neighboring sounds, is one of the most powerful agents of change. It turned Latin *c* ([k]) into various sounds when the *c* was followed by *i* or *e*. It became [ch] in Italian and Rômanian, [th] in Castilian Spanish, and [s] in the other derivatives of Latin.

Each group of sounds has its own ways of changing. Stressed vowels tend to get longer; unstressed vowels are often dropped; some languages like English and Swedish tend to make all their long vowels into diphthongs or sliding vowels, like those of "eye" and "owe."

Vowels are always shifting around. Between 1400 and 1700, English had a phonetic upheaval, the Great Vowel Shift. In Chaucer's time, "peel, pale, pile, pool, pole, pawl, pound" sounded about like "pale, pahla, peela, pole, pawla, powl, poond." The Scot who says "feev" and "oot" for "five" and "out" is being archaic, though his speech has changed much from Middle English in other directions. The most old-fashioned English speech of today is heard, I think, not in Kentucky as some say, but in Ontario. There many use a kind of Scotch-Irish brogue that comes as close as anything to the real language of Shakespeare. We have a good idea of the pronunciation of Shakespeare's time because that was when people began to write about pronunciation. For earlier times we have to rely on oddities of spelling.

So, if you were dropped back into the iron-pants era, you would find the English for all intents a foreign language. A twentieth-century man could not begin to understand it till about 1500.

The sound of a word can change in an enormous number of ways, and the laws that rule these changes are many and complex. Most changes tend towards shortening and simplification. Sounds are dropped much oftener than they are added. Thus Anglo-Saxon *hlâfweard* became *lord*, and in many Latin words that had *d* between vowels, like *fidelis, cadere*, the sound has disappeared in Spanish: *fiel, caer*.

One effect of many phonetic changes is *leveling;* that is, making words, once distinct in pronunciation, sound alike. Words that come to be sounded alike in this way are called *homophones*. English has many: no-know, past-passed,

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vain-vein-vane, rite-write-right-wright. Sometimes a pair are sounded alike in one part of a glossa but differently elsewhere: do-due (leveled by most Americans outside the South); shaw-shore-sure (leveled by most Englishmen); mite-might (leveled by everybody but the Scots).

In general, leveling cannot be reversed. Once the words come to sound alike, they will rarely again be distinguished—though "boil" and "bile" were once pronounced alike but were pried apart by the influence of the spelling.

As a result, a language gets cluttered with homophones which make it harder to understand. Chinese is the most homophonous language; one word may have sixty-nine meanings. Therefore the Chinese have a complicated system of compounding to show which of the scores of possible meanings is meant.

In Indo-European languages, most homophones cause no great trouble; the hearer can tell from the rest of the sentence which word is meant. Sometimes words are so closely related as to cause real confusion. Then one of the pair will probably go out of use. Thus "strait" and "straight," both adjectives meaning the shape of a thing, came to sound alike when the sound spelt *gh* (the same as German *ch*) was dropped. As they could easily be mixed up, "strait" has given way to "narrow" (which means the same thing) save in a few names like "Strait of Gibraltar."

In a large glossa, phonetic evolution goes off different ways in different places, making dialects. If the dialects become different enough they can no longer be understood by each other's speakers and are then called separate languages. This is how Latin split into Italian, French, Provençal, Catalan, Spanish, Portuguese, and Rômanian. Everybody likes to regard his own dialect as the "correct" form of the speech and all the *other* forms as "dialects."

Nobody knows why a language takes one direction in one part of a glossa and another in another. Why should the Scots keep the rolled [r] of Middle English while the rest of the English glossa makes it into a vowel-like glide, and the English drop it at the ends of words and before consonants? We don't know.

Besides the unknown force that widens the breaches between dialects, others forces tend to make them more alike: travel, education, and electrical reproduction of speech. When in the Middle Ages English was spoken by an ignorant peasantry who seldom went far from home, it swiftly evolved and branched out into many dialects. Now its rate of change has slowed down, and the dialects are losing their differences, though it

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may take centuries for them wholly to disappear. Nobody knows what the final uniform English will be. Probably the General American Dialect (spoken throughout most of the United States and Canada west of the Alleghenies) will have the most influence because it is the biggest single block of speakers in the glossa, with over a third of all English-speakers.

Modern civilization tends to stabilize and standardize speech. Schooling often stops folk-etymologies like "sparrow-grass" before they get established. Reading and writing can even make a language go backwards by restoring a lost sound, like the [l] of "fault" and the [h] of "host." Both were silent when the words came into English from French. This is called "spelling-pronunciation."

Contrarywise, under a post-atomic barbarism, speech would change more quickly and split into dialects again. Languages do not all evolve at the same speed. Some primitive tongues change very fast. Some tribes make them change even faster by deliberately altering the names for things. Kamehameha the Great of Hawaii went too far in 1800 when he celebrated the birth of a son by commanding new words for "man," "woman," and "dog." This law led to a revolt in which the son was slain.

Though we cannot understand the spoken English of 1400 without study, a modern Greek can barely understand the Greek of 2000 years ago. Let me tell a story I had from Willy Ley. The father of his wife Olga was a Russian professor who fled the Revolution to live in Istanbul, where Olga went around with Greek girls. One day she presented one of these to her father. He, being a Classical scholar, spoke to her in the speech of Homer and Plato. Later the girl asked:

"Olga, what part of Greece does your father come from? He speaks the strangest dialect I've ever heard!"

Most schoolteachers fight all changes in language as "incorrect." Many linguists make fun of their efforts as futile and useless. Neither group is altogether right. Education can slow or stop some changes, and changes may be good, bad, or indifferent. "The mans goed" would be more regular than "the men went" and easier for children and foreigners to learn. But changes that make more homophones, or make the spelling even more irregular, make the language harder. Most teachers, however, cannot tell good changes from bad and smite with equal fury at all.

How long before Hector Hero finds himself among people whose speech he cannot understand?

That depends on what happens to the speakers of English. If there is no relapse into barbarism,

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he may understand them well enough up to 500 years hence, or perhaps even one or two thousand. After that, who knows?

He might, like Beerbohm's time-traveler, find the spelling changed. People have complained of how their language is spelt from time immemorial. Some have tried to do something about it. The Emperor Claudius tried to add three letters to the Latin alphabet; Childeric I, King of the Franks in the sixth century, tried to add four. Neither got anywhere.

In the early years of this century, the Simplified Spelling League bravely tried to straighten out a few hundred irregularities and prune a few thousand silent letters from English orthography. Despite the backing of Theodore Roosevelt, they had little effect beyond knocking the final *-me* off "programme." Only the other day, after the death of Col. Robert R. McCormick, his Chicago *Tribune* gave up such simplified spellings as "fotograf."*

On the other hand, people *have* changed their writing-systems. Under the Ptolemies, the Egyptians switched from hieroglyphics to a modified Greek alphabet. Egyptian so written is called Coptic. When the Spaniards conquered Yucatán, the Mayas found the Latin alphabet so much easier than their complex picture-writing that they took to writing in Romanized Maya, as they still do, and soon forgot their old system.

In 1928, the Turkish dictator Kemal Atatürk decreed that Turkish should be spelt with a modified Latin alphabet instead of the Arabic. He gave the Turks only eight months for the change, which drove most publishers bankrupt. The literacy of Turkey, never high, was thus reduced at one stroke to zero. After a few years Turkish literary life revived, and the Turks were better off. The Arabic alphabet, fine for the consonantal root-system of Semitic tongues was ill-suited to Turkish.

One result of the Russian revolution was a reform in spelling that dropped five unneeded letters —a reform which even many White Russian exiles have accepted as the one good thing that came out of the revolution. The Dutch reformed their spelling some decades ago. The Chinese Communists are getting ready to replace their 40,000 ideographs† by a Romanized Chinese, while Mongolia is dropping its native alphabet, a remote and imperfect descendant of Aramaic script, for the more adequate Russian alphabet.

*Readers with sharp eyes will have noticed a quietly persistent effort in F&SF to establish a few of the less extreme simplifications.—A. B.

† For examples, impossible to reproduce typographically, see Tao-tai Hsia: *China's Language Reforms*, Inst. of Far Eastern Languages, Yale Univ., New Haven, Conn., 1956.

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On the other hand, the Swedes proposed a spelling-reform but never pushed it through. A few years ago the French government chose a commission to advise changes in French spelling. The commission proposed a drastic reform that would turn *oeux* into *eus, manger* into *manjer, théâtre* into *téâtre,* and *photographe* into *fotografe.* The proposal has never been acted upon, though. French politics being what they are, it may never be.

Spelling-reform, like reform of coinage or clothing-habits, runs into the weight of human inertia and the dislike of most adults for mental effort. Many agree that reform is needed but won't change their own ways. It usually takes a revolution or a dictator. The more literate a country is, the harder it is to change its spelling. Even when spelling is as hard as that of English, adults who have mastered it feel a vested interest in it.

On the other hand, English needs reform worse than any language except perhaps Tibetan, with *o* meaning different sounds in *no, off, go, come, wolf, do, worm, button;* with the same sound spelt differently in *he, see, sea, mien, ceiling, key, quay, Caesar, people, Phoebe, Leigh, police;* and with a swarm of oddities like *any, are, blood, broad, bury, busy, choir, colonel, gauge,* etcetera.

Nearly every change in pronunciation makes English spelling even less phonetic, and the courses of schools get more and more crowded, with less time for spelling-drills. So we have an irresistible force meeting an immovable body. Maybe there is a bare chance of spelling-reform in 500 years. Stranger things have happened.

The problem of just what changes to make would open up boundless fields of dispute, as you can see from the scores of phonetic orthographies already proposed. Speech is made up of basic sound-units called *phonemes.* In any language, two sounds belong to different phonemes if they can distinguish different words; otherwise not. Thus in English [h] and [f] are used to tell words like "foe" and "hoe" apart, but in Japanese [f] is merely "the variety of [h] used before [u]." So [h] and [f] belong to two phonemes in English but one in Japanese. Likewise in English the [k] sounds "cool" and "keel" are different but don't distinguish any pairs of words by themselves, whereas in Arabic these sounds do distinguish words and so belong to different phonemes. I could give hundreds more examples.

A perfect system of phonetic spelling uses one and only one letter per phoneme, except that long vowels, diphthongs, and compound consonants like the [tsh] in "etch" may be spelt with a pair of letters. With these rules, a

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phonetic (or more exactly *phonemic*) spelling of English needs at least twenty-eight letters. The present *c, q,* and *x* are useless and could be dropped, or kept for foreign names, or used for sounds for which English has no proper letters. There are advantages each way.

An ideal system of spelling would be based on the International Phonetic Aphabet, developed in the last century by phoneticians under the leadership of Paul Passy. Most IPA letters in ordinary transcription are from the Latin alphabet with their usual values: *b, d, f,* etcetera. As in German, *j* has the value of *y* in "yes." The vowel-letters *a, e, i, o, u* have "continental" values as in "f*a*ther, v*e*ry, pol*i*ce, m*o*re, r*u*le." The six sounds of English for which the Latin alphabet has no good symbols are those I can crudely show as [th, dh, sh, zh, ng] and the vowel of "up."* IPA symbols for these are:

θ ð ʃ ʒ ŋ ə

There are also special symbols for sound like French nasal vowels, Arabic gutturals, Hottentot clicks, and so forth.

Any reform would probably have to compromise between the ideal of a pure IPA system and the demands of typography and popular conservatism. Even if popular resistance could be overcome, a reform that meant scrapping all typewriters and linotype machines would be too costly even for a revolutionary dictator. But by sacrificing more symbols, the ordinary typewriter and type-casting keyboards could be adapted to a 28-letter alphabet.

Spelling-reform might come in through the back door through use of the IPA in language-teaching and dictionaries. The IPA is used now in most language-study and bilingual dictionaries and in some pronouncing dictionaries in English. But most American dictionaries of English stick close to the old Websterian system, a phonetician's horror. If publishers ever adopt the IPA in a big way, people will get used to the letters, and resistance to change would be less.

But this familiarity would not by itself bring reform. Look at Japan. Japanese is a fairly simple

* In a narrow phonetic transcription (that is, one that draws fine phonetic distinctions) different symbols are generally used for the two vowels of "above." The unstressed vowel is denoted by the inverted *e* given above, while the stressed vowel, which is also the vowel of "up," is symbolized by an inverted *v*. Phonetic orthographies, however, should always be based on the broadest possible phonetic transcription. Hence such a phonetic spelling of English would inevitably use one symbol for these two very similar sounds, and, in accordance with present usage, this symbol would almost surely be the inverted *e*.

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language, but its system of writing makes that of English look good. It has two *syllabaries* or sets of symbols each of which stands for one syllable: *ki, ke, ka, ko, ku, ri, re,* and so on. These are the simple *Katakana* and the more complicated and squiggly *Hiragana.* Each has seventy-four characters. Japanese also learn the Latin alphabet and scatter its letters through their printed matter for abbreviations. They have a system of Romanized Japanese, *Rômaji,* that works fine, as the Latin alphabet happens to fit the language well. They could write in one syllabary or in Rômaji. Everybody can read either.

What do they do? They write in a baffling mixture of Katakana, Hiragana, and Chinese ideographs or logographs, which they read as Japanese words just as you read "3" as "three." They spend extra years of schooling learning thousands of these wretched things. MacArthur once suggested that they drop the ideographs. The papers politely printed his advice, using ideographs as usual. You see, ideographs prove that the user is cultured, and no gentleman of Japan will give up this means of showing off his polish.

Well, how shall our time-traveler set out?

Since he doesn't know the future, he can't know what effect its history will have on language; whether a falling-back into barbarism will speed up linguistic change and the splitting of languages into dialects, whether upheavals will bring drastic reforms, whether vast changes will make the present supranational tongues decline and others rise in their places.

If, however, he's not going farther than a thousand years, he can probably get along by learning three or four of the present supranational languages. He may find the accents strange, but none is likely to have changed out of all recognition. If he can't understand what is said, he'd better have a pencil and pad along. I knew a man who asked a German hotel-clerk, in what was meant to be German, for a room. The clerk understood nothing and replied in what the clerk meant for English with no more success. At last the clerk wrote: "What do you gentlemen want?" Then all went smoothly.

If the traveler is going several thousand years ahead, he's on his own. There is little he can do but master some languages of today and study the science of linguistics to make it easier to learn the speech of the time he goes to. When he gets there, he'll have to hunt up some professor of dead languages to talk to.

Me, I think I'll stay in the twentieth century. I have enough trouble with today's languages.

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George P. Elliott is one of today's most distinguished creators of the "quality" short story—a regular recipient of major honors in the field. He has appeared five times in Martha Foley's BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES *and three in the* O. HENRY PRIZE AWARD STORIES, *and has received an Albert Bender Literary Grant-in-Aid, a fellowship from the Fund for the Advancement of Education and a fellowship in fiction from* The Hudson Review. *A surprising number of his stories, usually first printed in the top literary quarterlies, are science fiction or fantasy; and regular commercial practitioners in our field may envy his command of its technique: the ease with which he establishes the details of a carefully worked-out civilization (is the strange one in this story a part of some future or of a parallel universe?) and the insight with which he studies the personal emotions peculiar to that civilization, yet meaningful for all men.*

Sandra

by GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

A FEW YEARS AGO I INHERITED a handsome neo-Spanish house in a good neighborhood in Oakland. It was much too large for a single man, as I knew perfectly well; if I had behaved sensibly I would have sold it and stayed in my bachelor quarters; I could have got a good price for it. But I was not sensible; I liked the house very much; I was tired of my apartment-house life; I didn't need the money. Within a month I had moved in and set about looking for a housekeeper.

From the moment I began looking, everyone assured me that I should get a domestic slave. I was reluctant to get one, not so much because of the expense as because of my own inexperience. No one in my family had ever had one, and among my acquaintances there were not more than three or four who had any. Nevertheless, the arguments in favor of my buying a slave were too great to be ignored. The argument that irritated me most was the one used by the wives of my friends. "When you marry," they would say, "think how

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happy it will make your wife to have a domestic slave." Then they would offer, zealously, to select one for me. I preferred to do my own selecting. I began watching the classified ads for slaves for sale.

Some days there would be no slaves listed for sale at all; on Sundays there might be as many as ten. There would be a middle-aged Negro woman, 22 years experience, best recommendations, $4500; or a 35-year-old Oriental, speaks English, excellent cook, recommendations, $5000; or a middle-aged woman of German descent, very neat, no pets or vices . . . sensible choices, no doubt, but none of them appealed to me. Somewhere in the back of my mind there was the notion of the slave I wanted. It made me restless, looking; all I knew about it was that I wanted a female. I was hard to satisfy. I took to dropping by the Emeryville stores, near where my plant is located, looking for a slave. What few there were in stock were obviously of inferior quality. I knew that I would have to canvass the large downtown stores to find what I wanted. I saw the ads of Oakland's Own Department Store, announcing their January white sale; by some quirk, they had listed seven white domestic slaves at severely reduced prices. I took off a Wednesday, the first day of the sale, and went to the store at opening time, 9:45, to be sure to have the pick of the lot.

Oakland's Own is much the largest department store in the city. It has seven floors and two basements, and its quality runs from $1498 consoles to factory-reject cotton work socks. It has a good solid merchandising policy, and it stands behind its goods in a reassuring, old-fashioned way. The wives of my friends were opposed to my shopping in Oakland's Own, because, they said, secondhand slaves were so much better trained than new, and cost so little more. Nevertheless, I went.

I entered the store the moment the doors were opened, and went straight up to the sixth floor on the elevator. All the same I found a shapeless little woman in the slave alcove ahead of me picking over the goods—looking at their teeth and hair, telling them to bend over, to speak so she could hear the sound of their voices. I was furious at having been nosed out by the woman, but I could not help admiring the skill and authority with which she inspected her merchandise. She told me something about herself. She maintained a staff of four, but what with bad luck, disease and her husband's violent temper she was always having trouble. The Federal Slave Board had ruled against her twice—against her husband, really, but the slaves were registered in her name—and she had to watch her step. In fact she was on probation from the FSB now. One more adverse

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decision and she didn't know what she'd do. Well, she picked a strong, stolid-looking female, ordered two sets of conventional domestic costumes for her, signed the charge slip, and left. The saleswoman came to me.

I had made my decision. I had made it almost the moment I had come in, and I had been in agonies for fear the dumpy little shopper would choose my girl. She was not beautiful exactly, though not plain either, nor did she look especially strong. I did not trouble to read her case-history card; I did not even find out her name. I cannot readily explain what there was about her that attracted me. A certain air of insouciance as she stood waiting to be looked over—the bored way she looked at her fingernails and yet the fearful glance she cast from time to time at us shoppers—the vulgarity of her make-up and the soft charm of her voice—I do not know. Put it down to the line of her hip as she stood waiting, a line girlish and womanly at once, dainty and strong, at ease but not indolent. It's what I remember of her best from that day, the long pure line from her knee to her waist as she stood staring at her nails, cocky and scared and humming to herself.

I knew I should pretend impartiality and indifference about my choice. Even Oakland's Own permits haggling over the price of slaves; I might knock the price down as much as $300, particularly since I was paying for her cash on the line. But it wasn't worth the trouble to me. After three weeks of dreary looking I had found what I wanted, and I didn't feel like waiting to get it. I asked the saleswoman for the card on my slave. She was the sixth child of a carpenter in Chico. Chico is a miserable town in the plains of the San Joaquin Valley; much money is spent each year teaching the people of Chico how to read and write; *chico* means greasewood. Her father had put her up for sale, with her own consent, at the earliest legal age, eighteen, the year of graduation from high school. The wholesaler had taught her the rudiments of cooking, etiquette, and housecleaning. She was listed as above average in cleanliness, intelligence and personality, superb in copulation, and fair in versatility and sewing. But I had known as much from just looking at her, and I didn't care. Her name was Sandra, and in a way I had known that too. She had been marked down from $3850 to $3299. As the saleswoman said, how could I afford to pass up such a bargain? I got her to knock the price down the amount of the sales taxes, wrote out my check, filled out the FSB forms, and took my slave Sandra over to be fitted with clothes.

And right there I had my first trouble as a master, right on the fifth floor of Oakland's Own in

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the Women's Wear department. As a master, I was supposed to say to Sandra, or even better to the saleswoman about Sandra, "Plain cotton underwear, heavy-weight nylon stockings, two dark-blue maid's uniforms and one street dress of conservative cut," and so on and so on. *The slave submits to the master:* I had read it in the FSB manual for domestic slave owners. Now I find it's all very well dominating slaves in my office or my factory. I am chief engineer for the Jergen Calculating Machine Corp., and I have had no trouble with my industrial and white-collar slaves. They come into the plant knowing precisely where they are, and I know precisely where I am. It's all cut and dried. I prefer the amenities when dealing with, say, the PBX operator. I prefer to say, "Miss Persons, will you please call Hoskins of McKee Steel?" rather than "Persons, get me Hoskins of McKee." But this is merely a preference of mine, a personal matter, and I know it and Persons knows it. No, all that is well set, but this business of Sandra's clothes quite threw me.

I made the blunder of asking her her opinion. She was quick to use the advantage I gave her, but she was very careful not to go too far. "Would you like a pair of high heels for street wear?" I asked her. "If it is agreeable with you, sir." "Well, now, let's see what they have in your size. —Those seem sturdy enough and not too expensive. Are they comfortable?" "Quite comfortable, sir." "There aren't any others you'd rather have?" "These are very nice, sir." "Well, I guess these will do quite well, for the time being at least." "I agree with you, sir."

I agree with you: that's a very different matter from *I submit to you.* And though I didn't perceive the difference at the moment, still I was anything but easy in my mind by the time I had got Sandra installed in my house. Oh, I had no trouble preserving the proper reserve and distance with her, and I could not in the slightest detail complain of her behavior. It was just that I was not to the manner bred; that I was alone in the house with her, knowing certain external things to do, but supported by no customs and precedents as I was at the plant; that I found it very uncomfortable to order a woman, with whom I would not eat dinner at the same table, to come to my bed for an hour or so after she had finished washing the dishes. Sandra was delighted with the house and with her quarters, with the television set I had had installed for her and with the subscription to *Cosmopolitan* magazine that I had ordered in her name. She was delighted and I was glad she was delighted. That was the bad thing about it—I was glad. I should have provided these facilities only as a heavy industry

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provides half-hour breaks and free coffee for its workers—to keep her content and to get more work out of her. Instead I was as glad at her pleasure in them as though she were an actual person. She was so delighted that tears came to her eyes and she kissed my feet; then she asked me where the foot basin was kept. I told her I had none. She said that the dishpan would do until we got one. I told her to order a foot basin from Oakland's Own the next day, along with any other utensils or supplies she felt we needed. She thanked me, fetched the dishpan and washed my feet. It embarrassed me to have her do it; I knew it was often done, I enjoyed the sensuous pleasure of it, I admired the grace and care with which she bent over my feet like a shoeshine, but all the same I was embarrassed. Yet she did it every day when I came home.

I do not think I could describe more economically the earlier stages of my connection to Sandra than by giving an account of the foot washing.

At first, as I have said, I was uneasy about it, though I liked it too. I was not sure that as a slave she had to do it, but she seemed to think she had to and she certainly wanted to. Now this was all wrong of me. It is true that domestic slaves usually wash their masters' feet, but this is not in any sense one of the slave's rights. It is a matter about which the master decides, entirely at his own discretion. Yet, by treating it as a set duty, a duty like serving me food in which she had so profound an interest as to amount to a right, Sandra had from the outset made it impossible for me to will not to have her wash my feet. She did it every day when I came home; even when I was irritable and told her to leave me alone, she did it. Of course, I came to depend upon it as one of the pleasures and necessary routines of the day. It was, in fact, very soothing; she spent a long time at it and the water was always just lukewarm, except in cold weather when it was quite warm; she always floated a slice of lemon in the water. The curve of her back, the gesture with which she would shake the hair out of her eyes, the happy, private smile she wore as she did it, these were beautiful to me. She would always kiss, very lightly, the instep of each foot after she had dried them—always, that is, when we were alone.

If I brought a friend home with me, she would wash our feet all right, but matter-of-factly, efficiently, with no little intimacies as when I was alone. But if it was a woman who came with me, or a man and wife, Sandra would wash none of our feet. Nor did she wash the feet of any callers. I thought this was probably proper etiquette. I had not read my *Etiquette for Slaves* as well as Sandra obviously had. I let

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it go. During the first few weeks, all my friends, and particularly all my women friends, had to come to observe Sandra. She behaved surely and with complete consistency towards them all. I was proud of her. None of the women told me that Sandra was anything less than perfect, not even Helen who would have been most likely to, being an old friend and sharp-tongued. After the novelty had worn off, I settled down with her into what seemed to be a fine routine. To be sure, it was not long before I would think twice about bringing someone home for dinner with me; if there was much doubt in my mind about it, the difference in Sandra's foot washing alone would sway me not to bring my friend along, especially if my friend was a woman.

When I would come home late at night she would be waiting for me, with a smile and downcast eyes. I went, in October, to a convention in St. Louis for a week. When I came back, I think she spent an hour washing my feet, asking me to tell her about the physical conditions of my trip, nothing personal or intimate but just what I had eaten and what I had seen and how I had slept; but the voice in which she asked it— One night I came home very late, somewhat high, after a party. I did not want to disturb her, so I tried to go to my room noiselessly. But she heard me and came in in her robe to wash my feet; she helped me to bed, most gently. Not by a glance did she reproach me for having disturbed her sleep. But then, she never reproached me.

I did not realize fully how much I had come to depend on her until she fell sick. She was in the hospital with pneumonia for three days and spent six days convalescing. It was at Thanksgiving time. I declined invitations out to dinner, in order to keep Sandra company—to tend to her, I said to myself, though she tended to herself very nicely. I was so glad to have her well again that the first time she could come to me I kept her in my bed all night—so that she might not chill herself going back to her own bed, I told myself. That was the first time, yet by Christmas we were sleeping together regularly, though she kept her clothes in her own room. She still called me sir, she still washed my feet; according to the bill of sale I owned her: I thought her a perfect slave. I was uneasy no longer.

In fact, of course, I was making a fool of myself, and it took Helen to tell me so.

"Dell," she said over the edge of her cocktail glass, "you're in love with this creature."

"In love with Sandra!" I cried. "What do you mean?"

And I was about to expostulate hotly against the notion, when I bethought me that too much heat on my part would only confirm her in her opinion. Therefore, seeming

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to study the problem, I relapsed into a brown study—under Helen's watchful eye—and tried to calculate the best out for myself.

I rang for Sandra.

"More manhattans," I said to her.

She bowed, took the shaker on her tray, and left. She was impeccable.

"No, Helen," I said finally, "she does not make my pulses race. The truth is, I come a lot closer to being in love with you than with Sandra."

This threw her considerably off balance, as I had hoped it would.

"How absurd. You've never even made a pass at me."

"True."

But Sandra returned with the drinks, and after she had left we talked about indifferent matters.

As I was seeing Helen to the door, she said to me, "All the same, Dell, watch out. You'll be marrying this creature next. And who will drop by to see you then?"

"If I ever marry Sandra," I said, "it will not be for love. If I have never made a pass at you, my dear, it has not been for lack of love."

I looked at her rather yearningly, squeezed her hand rather tightly, and with a sudden little push closed the door behind her. I leaned against the wall for a moment and offered up a short prayer that Helen would never lose her present husband and come looking in my part of the world for another. I could have managed to love her all right, but she scared me to death.

I thought about what she had told me. I knew that I was not in love with Sandra—there were a thousand remnants of Chico in her that I could not abide—but I could not deny that I needed her very much. What Helen had made me see clearly was the extent to which I had failed to keep Sandra a slave. I did not know whether it was her scheming that had brought it about, or my slackness, or whether, as I suspected, something of both. Some of the more liberal writers on the subject say, of course, that such development is intrinsic in the situation for anyone in our cultural milieu. It is a problem recognized by the FSB in its handbook. But the handbook advises the master who finds himself in my predicament to trade his slave for another, preferably some stodgy, uninteresting number or one who is deficient in the proper qualities—in my case, as I thought, copulating. The trouble with this sound advice was that I didn't want to get rid of Sandra. She made me comfortable.

In fact, she made me so comfortable that I thought I was happy. I wanted to show my gratitude to her. After she had straightened up the kitchen that evening I called her into the living room where I was sitting over the paper.

"Yes, sir?" she said, standing demurely on the other side of the coffee table.

"Sandra," I began, "I'm very fond

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of you. I would like to do something for you."

"Yes, sir."

"Sit down."

"Thank you, sir."

As she sat, she took a cigarette from the box, without asking my permission, and lighted it. The way she arched her lips to smoke it, taking care not to spoil her lipstick, annoyed me, and the coy way she batted her eyelids made me regret I had called her in. "Still," I thought, "the Chico in her can be trained out. She's sound."

"What can I give you, Sandra?"

She did not answer for a moment. Every slave knows the answer to that question, and knows it is the one answer for which he won't be thanked.

"Whatever you wish to give me, sir, would be deeply appreciated."

I couldn't think of a thing to buy for her. Magazines, movies, television, clothes, jewelry, book club books, popular records, a permanent wave every four months, what else could I get her? Yet I had started this offer; I had to follow up with something. In my uneasiness and annoyance with myself, and knowing so well what it was she wanted, I went too far.

"Would you like freedom, Sandra?"

She dropped her eyes and seemed to droop a little. Then tears rolled down her cheeks, real mascara-stained tears of sadness.

"Oh yes, sir," she said. "Oh, my God, yes. Don't tease me about it. Please don't tease me."

So I promised her her freedom. I myself was moved, but I did not want to show it.

"I'm going for a short walk," I said. "You may go to your room."

I went for my walk, and when I came back she had prepared my foot bath. She had burned two pine boughs in the fireplace so that the room smelled wonderful. She had put on her loveliest dress, and had brushed her hair down as I liked it best. She did not speak as she washed my feet, nor even look up at my face. All her gratitude she expressed in the tenderness with which she caressed my feet and ankles. When she had finished drying them, she kissed them and then pressed them for a time against her breast. I do not think either of us, during these past years, has ever been happier than at that moment.

Well, I had my lawyer draw up a writ of substantial manumission, and Sandra took the brass ring out of her left ear, and that was that. And that was about all of that, so far as I could see. She was free to go as she wanted, but she didn't want. She got wages now, it is true, but all she did with them was to buy clothes and geegaws. She continued to take care of my house and me, to sleep in my bed and keep her own possessions in her own room, and to wash my

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feet as before. The manumission was nothing in itself, only a signpost that there had been some changes made. Continually and slowly changes kept being made.

For one thing, we began to eat together, unless I had guests in to dinner. For another, she began to call me Mr. Oakes. It seemed strange to have her go where she wanted, without asking me about it, on her nights out. I became so curious about what she could be doing that finally I asked her where she went. To night school, she said, learning how to type. I was delighted to hear that she had not been wasting her time at public dances, but I could not imagine why she wanted to learn typing. She had even bought a portable typewriter which she practiced on in her room when I was away. "Why?" she said. "My mother always said to me, 'Sandra, they can't fire slaves.' Well, I'm not a slave any longer. That was one nice thing about it, I wasn't ever afraid you'd fire me." "But, my darling," I cried, "I'm never going to fire you. I couldn't possibly get along without you." "I know it," she replied, "and I never want to leave either. All the same, I'm going to learn how to type." She had her own friends in to visit her; she even gave a bridge party one evening when I was not at home. But she never called me by my first name, she never checked up on me, she never asked me the sort of intrusive, prying question which a man hates answering. She kept her place.

Then she discovered she was pregnant. I immediately said I would assume all the financial responsibilities of her pregnancy and of rearing the child. She thanked me, and did not mention the subject again. But she took to sleeping in her own bed most of the time. She would serve breakfast while still in her robe and slippers. Her eyes were often red and swollen, though she always kept some sort of smile on her face. She mentioned something about going back to Chico. She began serving me canned soup at dinner. I drove her off to Reno and married her.

Helen had been right, I had married Sandra; but I had been right too, it wasn't for love. Oh, I loved her, some way or other, I don't know just how. But I had married her simply because it was the next thing to do; it was just another milestone.

Nothing much happened for a while after we were married, except that she called me Dell and didn't even take the curlers out of her hair at breakfast. But she hadn't got to be free and equal overnight. That was to take some months of doing.

First of all, as a wife, she was much frailer than she had been as a slave. I had to buy all sorts of things for her, automatic machines to wash the clothes and the dishes,

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a cooking stove with nine dials and two clocks, an electric ironer that could iron a shirt in two minutes, a vacuum cleaner, one machine to grind the garbage up and another to mix pancake batter, a thermostatic furnace, an electric floor waxer, and a town coupe for her to drive about to do her errands in. She had to get other people to wash her hair now, and shave her legs and armpits, and polish her toenails and fingernails for her. She took out subscriptions to five ladies' magazines, which printed among them half a million words a month for her to read, and she had her very bathrobe designed in Paris. She moved the television set into the living room and had a tear-drop chandelier hung from the center of the ceiling. When she had a miscarriage in her sixth month, she had a daily bouquet of blue orchids brought to her room; she had to rest, and pale blue orchids are so restful. She became allergic to the substances of which my mattress and pillows were composed, and I had to get a foam rubber mattress and foam rubber pillows, which stank. She finally insisted that we go to visit her family in Chico, so we finally did, and that we go visit my family in Boston, so we finally did. The visits were equally painful. We began to go to musical comedies and night clubs. Helen had been right: my friends did not drop by to see us, and they were apt to be sick when I invited them to dinner. Still we weren't all the way.

One night I came home late from work, tired and hungry. Dinner was not yet started, because Sandra had been delayed by her hairdresser. She fixed pork chops, frozen green beans, and bread and butter, with canned apricots for dessert. I could have done better myself. After dinner, after the machine had washed the dishes, I asked her if she would bathe my feet. I was so tired, I told her, my feet were so tired; it would be very soothing to me. But she said, in an annoyed voice, that she was feeling nervous herself. She was going to go to bed early. Besides, the silence she left behind her said, besides I am your wife now. She went to bed and I went to bed. She was restless; she twisted and turned. Every time I would shift my position or start to snore a little, she would sigh or poke me. Finally she woke me clear up and said it was impossible for her to sleep like this. Why didn't I go sleep in her former room? She couldn't because of her allergy, she had to stay in the foam rubber bed. So I moved into her room. And then I knew that she was equal, for most of the equal wives of my friends lived like this.

Another night, I came home wanting very much to make love to her. She had avoided my embrace for a long while. She was always too nervous, or too tired, for the less she worked the tireder she

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became; or she was busy, or simply not in the mood. But tonight I would admit of no evasion. She was beautiful and desirable, and I knew how well she had once made love with me. Finally, I held her in my arms. She knew I wanted her, and in a way as odd as mine she loved me too. But there was no sensuous pressure of her body against mine, no passion in her kiss. She put her arms about my neck not to caress me but to hang like an albatross against me. She pressed her head against my shoulder not for amorous affection but to hide her face, to shelter it, in loneliness and fear and doubt. She did not resist me, or yield to me, or respond to me, or try to overcome me. She only went away and left me her body to do with as I pleased. And then I knew that she was free, for most of the free wives of my friends were like this with their husbands.

I had four choices, as I saw it: divorce her, have her psychoanalyzed, kill her, or return her to slavery. I was strongly tempted to kill her, but I was an optimist, I thought she was salvageable. Besides, who would do my housework for me? I made her a slave again.

It is a wise provision of the law that says no slave may be completely manumitted. Even substantial manumission provides for a five-year probationary period. Sandra had not passed probation. I had the necessary papers drawn up, told her, an hour before the men came, what was happening, and had her sent to the FSB Rehabilitation School in Colorado for a month.

She came back with the ring in her ear, saying sir to me, and the very first night she washed my feet. Furthermore she made love better than she had done for a year. I thought we were to be happy again, and for a week we seemed to be. But the machines are still there to do most of the work, and she still has her allergy. She does what a slave is supposed to do, but she is depressed about it. She has tasted the fruit of freedom; though it is a bitter fruit it is habit-forming. She does what she is supposed to do, but it is an effort, she has to will it, it exhausts her.

One evening six months ago, I came home to find no dinner cooking, no foot bath waiting for me, no sign of Sandra in her room. I found her lying on my bed reading *McCall's* and smoking with a jewel-studded holder I had given her when she was my wife. She flicked an ash onto the rug when I entered the room, waved a langorous *Hi!* at me, and kept on reading. I had my choice; she had clearly set it up for me. I hesitated only a moment. I went down to the basement where I had stored away the three-thonged lash which had been provided along with the manual of instructions when I had first bought her, and I beat her on the bed where she lay.

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I think I was more upset by the beating than Sandra was. But I knew I had had to do it. I knew I had neglected my duty as a master not to have done it long ago. I think, now, that all this trouble could have been avoided if formerly I had only kept a firm hand, that is to say, had beaten her when she had risen too presumptuously. For the truth is, Sandra is happiest as a slave.

But the beatings I should have given her formerly would simply have hurt; she would simply have avoided them. Now, I am not so sure.

For she repeated the offense, exactly, within a month, and I repeated the punishment. It wasn't so bad for me the second time. She began seeing just how far she could go before I would bring out the lash. She cooked more and more badly till I gave her warning one evening. When I had finished speaking, she sank to the floor, pressed her forehead against my foot, looked at me, and said, "Your wish is my command." The irony was all in the act and words, if irony there was, for there was none in the voice or face. The truth was, as she discovered the next evening when she served me corned beef hash and raw carrots for dinner, my lash is her command. She seems happier, in a way, after these distasteful blow-ups, comes to my bed voluntarily and with the welts still on her back, does her work well, hums sometimes. Yet she falls back into her old stubborn mood, again and again. There seems to be nothing else for me to do but beat her. The FSB manual supports me. Yet I find it repugnant, and it cannot be good for Sandra's skin. I had to lash her a week ago, and already, from the dirt she is allowing to collect on the living room rug, it looks as though I'll have to do it again.

It seems a pity to have to resort to this, when it was all quite unnecessary. It's my own fault of course; I lacked the training, the matter-of-fact experience of being a master, and I did not set about my duties as a master so conscientiously as I should have. I know all this, but knowing it doesn't help matters a bit. Sometimes I think I should have killed her: it would have been better for both of us; but then she will do some little act of spontaneous love, as now bringing me a cup of hot chocolate and kissing me lightly on the back of the neck, which makes me glad to have her around. Yet tomorrow I shall have to beat her again. This is not what I had wanted, and it cannot be what she wants, not really. We were uneasy and felt something lacking when she was a slave before, though we were happy too. We were altogether miserable when she was free. Yet, this is not what either of us had ever wanted, though we are both of us doing what we must.

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My thanks (and, I trust, yours) to Joe Christopher, of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, for calling my attention to this little-known science-fictional sketch, in which the mathematician-creator of Wonderland uses a surprising sort of Victorian electroencephalogram to satirize the novels of his (and every) era.

Photography Extraordinary

by LEWIS CARROLL

THE RECENT EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERY in Photography, as applied to the operations of the mind, has reduced the art of novel-writing to the merest mechanical labour. We have been kindly permitted by the artist to be present during one of his experiments; but as the invention has not yet been given to the world, we are only at liberty to relate the results, suppressing all details of chemicals and manipulation.

The operator began by stating that the ideas of the feeblest intellect, when once received on properly prepared paper, could be "developed" up to any required degree of intensity. On hearing our wish that he would begin with an extreme case, he obligingly summoned a young man from an adjoining room, who appeared to be of the very weakest possible physical and mental powers. On being asked what we thought of him we candidly confessed that he seemed incapable of anything but sleep; our friend cordially assented to this opinion.

The machine being in position, and a mesmeric rapport established between the mind of the patient and the object glass, the young man was asked whether he wished to say anything; he feebly replied "Nothing." He was then asked what he was thinking of, and the answer, as before, was "Nothing." The artist on this pronounced him to be in a most satisfactory state, and at once commenced the operation.

After the paper had been exposed for the requisite time, it was removed and submitted to our inspection; we found it to be covered with faint and almost illegible characters. A closer scrutiny revealed the following:

"The eve was soft and dewy

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mild; a zephyr whispered in the lofty glade, and a few light drops of rain cooled the thirsty soil. At a slow amble, along the primrose-bordered path rode a gentle-looking and amiable youth, holding a light cane in his delicate hand; the pony moved gracefully beneath him, inhaling as it went the fragrance of the roadside flowers; the calm smile, and languid eyes, so admirably harmonising with the fair features of the rider, showed the even tenor of his thoughts. With a sweet though feeble voice, he plaintively murmured out the gentle regrets that clouded his breast:

'Alas! she would not hear my prayer!
Yet it were rash to tear my hair;
Disfigured, I should be less fair.

'She was unwise, I may say blind;
Once she was lovingly inclined;
Some circumstance has changed her mind.'

There was a moment's silence; the pony stumbled over a stone in the path, and unseated his rider. A crash was heard among the dried leaves; the youth arose; a slight bruise on his left shoulder, and a disarrangement of his cravat, were the only traces that remained of this trifling accident."

"This," we remarked, as we returned the paper, "belongs apparently to the milk-and-water School of Novels."

"You are quite right," our friend replied, "and, in its present state, it is, of course, utterly unsaleable in the present day: we shall find, however, that the next stage of development will remove it into the strong-minded or Matter-of-Fact School." After dipping it into various acids, he again submitted it to us: it had now become the following:

"The evening was of the ordinary character, barometer at 'change'; a wind was getting up in the wood, and some rain was beginning to fall; a bad look-out for the farmers. A gentleman approached along the bridle-road, carrying a stout knobbed stick in his hand, and mounted on a serviceable nag, possibly worth some £40 or so; there was a settled business-like expression on the rider's face, and he whistled as he rode; he seemed to be hunting for rhymes in his head, and at length repeated, in a satisfied tone, the following composition:

'Well! so my offer was no go!
She might do worse, I told her so;
She was a fool to answer "No."

'However, things are as they stood;
Nor would I have her if I could,
For there are plenty more as good.'

At this moment the horse set his foot in a hole, and rolled over; his rider rose with difficulty; he had sustained several severe bruises

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and fractured two ribs; it was some time before he forgot that unlucky day."

We returned this with the strongest expression of admiration, and requested that it might now be developed to the highest possible degree. Our friend readily consented, and shortly presented us with the result, which he informed us belonged to the Spasmodic or German School. We perused it with indescribable sensations of surprise and delight:

"The night was wildly tempestuous—a hurricane raved through the murky forest—furious torrents of rain lashed the groaning earth. With a headlong rush—down a precipitous mountain gorge—dashed a mounted horseman armed to the teeth—his horse bounded beneath him at a mad gallop, snorting fire from its distended nostrils as it flew. The rider's knotted brows—rolling eyeballs—and clenched teeth—expressed the intense agony of his mind—weird visions loomed upon his burning brain—while with a mad yell he poured forth the torrent of his boiling passion:

'Firebrands and daggers! hope hath fled!
To atoms dash the doubly dead!
My brain is fire—my heart is lead!

'Her soul is flint, and what am I?
Scorch'd by her fierce, relentless eye,
Nothingness is my destiny!'

There was a moment's pause. Horror! his path ended in a fathomless abyss. . . . A rush—a flash—a crash—all was over. Three drops of blood, two teeth, and a stirrup were all that remained to tell where the wild horseman met his doom."

The young man was now recalled to consciousness, and shown the result of the workings of his mind; he instantly fainted away.

In the present infancy of the art we forbear from further comment on this wonderful discovery; but the mind reels as it contemplates the stupendous addition thus made to the powers of science.

Our friend concluded with various minor experiments, such as working up a passage of Wordsworth into strong, sterling poetry: the same experiment was tried on a passage of Byron, at our request, but the paper came out scorched and blistered all over.

As a concluding remark: *could* this art be applied (we put the question in the strictest confidence) —*could* it, we ask, be applied to the speeches in Parliament? It may be but a delusion of our heated imagination, but we will still cling fondly to the idea, and hope against hope.

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Like most s.f. magazines, we find that college and university towns are major centers in our distribution; and it seems fitting to publish a college story at this season when those towns are stirring with new autumnal life. But this is not a rousing rah-rah story for undergraduates. (We'll bring you an agreeable Martian specimen of that genre next month, when the football season is in full swing.) This is a story for the Old Grad, who has reached the point where he begins "to relive the past and regret the present" . . . and I wonder how young Mr. Matheson manages to understand so acutely the emotions which lie a decade ahead of him. This seems to me an even more impressive fictional feat than understanding the torments of an incredible shrinking man.

Old Haunts

by RICHARD MATHESON

ORIGINALLY HE'D INTENDED TO SPEND the one night in town at the Hotel Tiger. But it had occurred to him that maybe his old room was available. It was summer session now and there might not be a student living there. It was certainly worth a try. He could think of nothing more pleasant than sleeping in his old room, in his old bed.

The house was the same. He moved up the cement steps, smiling at their still crumbled edges. Same old steps, he thought, still on the bum. As was the sagging screen door to the porch and the doorbell that had to be pushed in at an angle before connection was made. He shook his head, smiling, and wondered if Miss Smith were still alive.

It wasn't Miss Smith who answered the bell. His heart sank as, instead of her tottering old form, a husky middle-aged woman came bustling to the door.

"Yes?" she said, her voice a harsh, inhospitable sound.

"Is Miss Smith still here?" he asked, hoping, in spite of everything, that she was.

"No, Miss Ada's been dead for years."

It was like a slap on his face. He felt momentarily stunned as he nodded at the woman.

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"I see," he said then. "I see. I used to room here while I was in college, you see, and I thought . . ."

Miss Smith dead.

"You going to school?" the woman asked.

He didn't know whether to take it as insult or praise.

"No, no," he said, "I'm just passing through on my way to Chicago. I graduated many years ago. I wondered if . . . anyone was living in the old room."

"The hall room, you mean?" the woman asked, regarding him clinically.

"That's right."

"Not till fall," she said.

"Could I . . . look at it?"

"Well, I . . ."

"I thought I might stay overnight," he said, hastily, "that is, if—"

"Oh, *that's* all right." The woman warmed her tone. "If that's what you want."

"I would," he said. "Sort of renew old acquaintanceship, you know."

He smiled self-consciously, wishing he hadn't said that.

"What would you want to pay?" asked the woman, more concerned with money than with memories.

"Well, I tell you," he said, impulsively, "I used to pay twenty dollars a month. Suppose I pay you that."

"For one night?"

He felt foolish. But he couldn't back down now even though he felt that his offer had been a nostalgic blunder. No room was worth twenty dollars a night.

He caught himself. Why quibble? It was worth that much to relive old memories. Twenty dollars was nothing to him anymore. The past was.

"Glad to pay it," he said. "Well worth it to me."

He slid the bills from his wallet with awkward fingers and held them out to her.

He glanced at the bathroom as they walked down the dimlit hall. The familiar sight made him smile. There was something wonderful about returning. He couldn't help it; there just was.

"Yes, Miss Ada's been dead nigh onto five years," the woman said.

His smile faded.

When the woman opened the door to the room he wanted to stand there for a long moment looking at it before letting himself enter once more. But she stood waiting for him and he knew he'd feel ridiculous asking her to wait so he took a deep breath and went in.

Time travel. The phrase crossed his mind as he entered the room. Because it seemed as if he was suddenly back; the new student stepping into the room for the first time, suitcase in hand, at the beginning of a new adventure.

He stood there mutely, looking around the room, a sense of inexplicable fright taking hold of

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him. The room seemed to bring back everything. *Everything*. Mary and Norman and Spencer and David and classes and concerts and parties and dances and football games and beer-busts and all-night talks and everything. Memories crowded on him until it seemed that they would crush him.

"It's a little dusty but I'll clean it up when you go out to eat," the woman said. "I'll go get you some sheets."

He didn't hear her words or her footsteps moving down the hallway. He stood there possessed by the past.

He didn't know what it was that made him shudder and look around suddenly. It wasn't a sound or anything he saw. It was a feeling in his body and mind; a sense of unreasonable foreboding.

He jumped with a gasp as the door slammed violently shut.

"It's the wind does it," said the woman returning with sheets for his old bed.

Broadway. The traffic light turned red and he eased down the brake. His gaze moved across the store fronts.

There was the Crown Drug Store, still the same. Next to it, Flora Dame's Shoe Store. His eyes moved across the street. The Glendale Shop was still there. Barth's Clothes was still in its old location too.

Something in his mind seemed to loosen and he realized that he had been afraid of seeing the town changed. For when he'd turned the corner onto Broadway and seen that Mrs. Sloane's Book Shoppe and The College Grille were gone he'd felt almost a sense of betrayal. The town he remembered existed intact in his mind and it gave him a tense, restless feeling to see it partially changed. It was like meeting an old friend and discovering, with a shock, that one of his legs was gone.

But enough things were the same to bring the solemn smile back to his lips.

The College Theatre where he and his friends had gone to midnight shows on Saturday nights after a date or long hours of study. The Collegiate Bowling Alleys; upstairs from them, the pool room.

And downstairs . . .

Impulsively, he pulled the car to the curb and switched off the motor. He sat there looking, for a moment, at the entrance to the Golden Campus. Then he slid quickly from the car.

The same old awning hung over the doorway, its once gaudy colors worn conservative by time and weather. He moved forward, a smile playing on his lips.

Then a sense of overpowering depression struck him as he stood looking down the steep, narrow staircase. He caught hold of the railing with his fingers and, after hesitating, let himself down slowly.

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He hadn't remembered the stairway being *this* narrow.

Near the bottom of the stairs, a whirring sound reached his ears. Someone was waxing the small dance floor with rotary brushes. He moved down the last step and saw the small Negro following the gently bucking machine around the floor. He saw and heard the metal nose of the polisher bump into one of the columns that marked the boundaries of the dance floor.

Another frown crossed his face. The place was so small, so dingy. Surely memory hadn't erred that badly. No, he hastily explained to himself. No, it was because the place was empty and there were no lights. It was because the jukebox wasn't frothing with colored bubbles and there were no couples dancing.

Unconsciously, he slid his hands into his trouser pockets, a pose he hadn't assumed more than once or twice since he'd left college eighteen years before. He moved closer to the dance floor, nodding once to the low, battered bandstand as one would to an old acquaintance.

He stood by the dance floor edge and thought of Mary.

How many times had they circled that tiny area, moving to the rhythms that pulsed from the glowing juke box? Dancing slowly, their bodies intimately close, her warm hand idly stroking the back of his neck. How many times? Something tightened in his stomach. He could almost see her face again. He turned away quickly from the dance floor and looked at the dark wooden booths.

A forced smile raised his lips. Were they still there? He moved around the edge of a column and started for the back.

"You lookin' fo' somebody, suh?" the old Negro asked.

"No, no," he said. "I just want to look at something."

He moved down the rows of booths, trying to ignore the feeling of awkwardness. Which one is it? he asked himself. He couldn't remember; they all looked the same. He stopped, hands on hips, and looked at all the booths, shaking his head slowly. On the dance floor, the Negro finished his polishing, pulled the plug out and drew the lumbering machine away. The place grew deathly still.

He found them in the third booth he looked at. Worn thin, the letters almost as dark as the surrounding wood but, most assuredly, there. He slid into the booth and looked at them.

B.J. Bill Johnson. And, under the initials, the year 1939.

He thought about all the nights he and Spence and Dave and Norm had sat in this booth dissecting the universe with the deft, assured scalpels of college seniors.

"We thought we had it all," he murmured. "Every darn bit of it."

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Slowly, he took off his hat and set it down on the table. What he wished for now was a glass of the old beer: that thick, malty brew that filled your veins and pumped your heart, as Spence used to say.

He nodded his head in appreciation, toasting a quiet toast.

"To you," he whispered. "The unbeatable past."

As he said it, he looked up from the table and saw a young man standing far across the room at the shadowy foot of the stairway. Johnson looked at the young man, unable to see him sharply without his glasses on.

After a moment, the young man turned and went back up the stairs. Johnson smiled to himself. Come back at six, he thought. The place doesn't open till six.

That made him think again of all the nights he'd spent down here in the musty dimness, drinking beer, talking, dancing, spending his youth with the casual improvidence of a millionaire.

He sat silent in the semi-darkness, memories swirling about him like a restless tide, lapping at his mind, forcing him to keep his lips pressed together because he knew that all this was gone forever.

In the midst of it, the memory of her came again. Mary, he thought and he wondered what had ever become of Mary.

It started again as he walked under the archway that led to the campus. An uneasy feeling that past and present were blending, that he was tightrope-walking between the two of them, on the verge of falling into either one.

The feeling dogged his steps, chilling the sense of elation he felt at being back.

He'd look at a building, thinking of the classes he'd taken there, the people he'd known there. Then, almost in the same moment, he'd see his present life, the dull empty rounds of selling. The months and years of solitary driving around the country. Ending only in return to a home he disliked, a wife he did not love.

He kept thinking about Mary. What a fool he'd been to let her go. To think, with the thoughtless assurance of youth, that the world was replete with endless possibilities. He'd thought it a mistake to choose so early in life and embrace the present good. He'd been a great one for looking for greener pastures. He'd kept looking until all his pastures were brown with time.

That feeling again: a combination of sensations. A creeping dissatisfaction that gnawed at him and choked him—and a restless, pursued feeling. An inescapable urge to look over his shoulder and see who was following him. He couldn't dismiss it and it bothered and upset him.

Now he was walking along the east side of the campus, his suit

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coat thrown over his right arm, his woven hat cocked back on his balding head. He could feel small sweat drops trickling down his back as he walked.

He wondered if he should stop and sit on the campus a while. There were several students sprawled out under the trees, laughing and chatting.

But he was leery of speaking to students anymore. Just before he'd come onto the campus, he'd stopped at the Campus Cafe for a glass of iced tea. He'd sat next to a student there and tried to start a conversation.

The young man had treated him with insufferable deference. He hadn't said anything about it, of course, but it had been highly offensive.

Something else had happened too. While he was moving for the cashier's booth, a young man had walked by outside. Johnson had thought he knew him and had raised his arm to catch the student's attention.

Then he'd realized it was impossible that he knew any of the current students and he'd guiltily lowered his arm. He had paid his check, feeling very depressed.

The depression still clung to him as he walked up the steps of the Liberal Arts Building.

He turned at the head of the steps and looked back over the campus. In spite of deflated sentiment, it gave him a lift to see the campus still the same. It, at least, was unchanged and there was some sense of continuity in the world.

He smiled and turned, then turned again. *Was* there someone following him? The feeling was certainly strong enough. His worried gaze moved over the campus without seeing anything unusual. With an irritated shrug, he walked into the building.

It was still the same too and it made him feel good to walk on the dark tile floors again, beneath the ceiling murals, up the marble steps, through the sound-proof, air-cooled halls.

He didn't notice the face of the student who walked by him even though their shoulders almost touched. He did seem to notice the student looking at him. But he wasn't sure and, when he looked over his shoulder, the student had turned a corner.

The afternoon passed slowly. He walked from building to building, entering each one religiously, looking at bulletin boards, glancing into classrooms and smiling carefully timed smiles at everything.

But he was beginning to feel a desire to run away. He resented the fact that no one spoke to him. He thought of going to the alumni director and chatting with him but he decided against it. He didn't want to seem pretentious. He was just an ex-student quietly visiting the scenes of his college days. That

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was all. No point in making a show of it.

As he walked back to the room that evening after supper, he had the definite impression that someone was following him.

Yet, whenever he stopped with a suspicious frown and looked back, there was nothing. Only the sound of cars honking down on Broadway or the laughter of young men up in their rooms.

On the porch steps of the house he stopped and looked up the street, an uneasy chill running down his back. Probably perspired too much this afternoon, he thought. Now the cooling air was chilling him. After all, he wasn't as young as—

He shook his head, trying to rid his mind of the phrase. A man's as young as he feels, he told himself authoritatively and nodded once curtly to impress the fact on his mind.

The woman had left the front door unlocked. As he entered, he heard her talking on the telephone in Miss Smith's bedroom. Johnson nodded to himself. How many times had he spoken to Mary on that old phone? What was the number again? 4458. That was it. He smiled proudly at being able to remember it.

How many times had he sat there in the old black rocker exchanging light conversation with her? His face fell. Where was she now? Was she married and did she have children? Did she—

He stopped, tensing, as a floor board creaked behind him. He waited a moment, expecting to hear the woman's voice. Then he looked back quickly.

The hallway was empty.

With a swallow, he entered his room and shut the door firmly. He fumbled for the light switch and finally found it.

He smiled again. This was more like it. He walked around his old room, running his hand over the top of the bureau, the student's desk, the mattress on the bed. He tossed down his hat and coat on the desk and settled down on the bed with a weary sigh. A grin lit his face as the old springs groaned. Same old springs, he thought.

He threw up his legs and fell back on the pillow. God, but it felt good. He ran his fingers over the bedspread, stroking it affectionately.

The house was very still. Johnson turned on his stomach and glanced out the window. There was the old alley, the big oaktree still towering over the house. He shook his head at the chest-filling sensation that thoughts of the past caused in him.

Then he started as the door thudded slightly in its frame. He looked quickly over his shoulder. *It's the wind does it,* the woman's words came to him.

He was certainly overwrought, he decided, but all these things

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were disturbing. Well, that was understandable. The day had been an emotional experience. To relive the past and regret the present was a full day's work for any man.

He was drowsy after the heavy meal he'd eaten at the Black and Gold Inn. He pushed himself up and shuffled over to the light switch.

The room plunged into darkness and he felt his way cautiously back to the bed. He lay down with a satisfied grunt.

It was still a good old bed. How many nights had he slept there, his brain seething with the contents of books he'd been studying? He reached down and loosened his belt, pretending he didn't feel a twinge of remorse at the way his once slender body had thickened. He sighed as the pressure on his stomach was eased. Then he rolled on his side in the warm, airless room and closed his eyes.

He lay there for a few minutes listening to the sound of a car passing in the street. Then he rolled onto his back with a groan. He stretched out his legs, let them go slack. Then he sat up and, reaching down, untied his shoes and dropped them on the floor. He fell back on the pillow and turned on his side again with a sigh.

It came slowly.

At first he thought it was his stomach bothering him. Then he realized it wasn't just his stomach muscles but every muscle in his body. He felt bands of ligament drawing in and a shudder ran through his frame.

He opened his eyes and blinked in the darkness. What in God's name was wrong? He stared at the desk and saw the dark outline of his hat and coat. Again, he closed his eyes. He had to relax. There were some big customers coming up in Chicago.

It's *cold,* he thought irritably, fumbling around at his side and finally drawing the bedspread over his stout body. He felt his skin crawling. He found himself listening but there was no other sound than the harshness of his own breathing. He twisted uncomfortably, wondering how the room could have gotten so cold all of a sudden. He must have gotten a chill.

He rolled onto his back and opened his eyes.

In an instant, his body stiffened and all sound was paralyzed in his throat.

There, leaning over him, bare inches from him, was the whitest, the most hating face he had ever seen in his entire life.

He lay there, staring up in numb, open-mouthed horror at the face.

"*Get out,*" said the face, its grating voice hoarse with malevolence. "*Get out. You can't come back.*"

For a long time after the face had disappeared, Johnson lay there, barely able to breathe, his hands in rigid knots at his sides, his eyes

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wide and staring. He kept trying to think but the memory of the face and the words spoken petrified his mind.

He didn't stay. When strength had returned, he got up, and managed to sneak out without attracting the attention of the woman. He drove quickly from the town, his face pale, thinking only of what he'd seen.

Himself.

The face of himself when he was in college. His young self hating this coarsened interloper for intruding himself on what could never be his again. And the young man in the Golden Campus; that had been his younger self. The student passing the Campus Cafe had been himself as he once was. And the student in the hallway and the resentful presence that had followed him around the campus, hating him for coming back and pawing at the past—they had all been him.

He never went back and he never told anyone what had happened. And when, in rare moments, he spoke of his college days, it was always with a shrug and a cynical smile to show how little it had really meant to him.

Through Time and Space With Ferdinand Feghoot

In 2916, after a captivity of twenty-two years, Ferdinand Feghoot escaped from the planet Aah-ook. As soon as he landed on Earth, hundreds of reporters surrounded him and began asking questions, which he answered with his usual directness:

"The Aah ookians are highly intelligent dragonoid beings upwards of eight hundred yards long."

"I was taken by one called Urk-tss. He was so old that he had a full set of false teeth, uppers and lowers. Each plate measured at least fifty yards front to back."

"No, he treated me very humanely. My only task was to take the seeds out of melons and things so that they wouldn't get under his teeth; and he went to great lengths to protect me from bat-weevils and other huge vermin. In fact, he had one of his molars hollowed out into a cozy three-room apartment, and allowed me to live there."

"You poor, dear man!" sighed a sob-sister. "How dreadful — to be a slave all those years."

"A slave? Goodness, no!" replied Ferdinand Feghoot. "I was an indentured servant."

GRENDEL BRIARTON

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In a breakdown of technology, what scientific technician might, at times, be most acutely missed? Mr. Angus has a new answer, and his quiet realism makes it painfully convincing.

About Time to Go South

by DOUGLAS ANGUS

THE TWO MEN WALKED ALONG THE wide, empty street, their heavy shoes crunching on the endless shards of glass.

"I thought it would be easy," the tall one said, "but there aren't any signs."

"The signs were always printed on the second-story windows," the short, redheaded one said. "Don't you remember? And now there aren't any windows, so there aren't any signs." As he spoke, his mouth, as much of it as showed through his fox-brush beard, seemed to squirm around to one side of his face.

They continued on through the silence. Once the tall one stooped and picked up a fragment of brick to throw at three crows perched on a crumbling cornice, but before the jagged crumble of clay left his hand, the soot-colored birds went flapping down the street between the high buildings. "Haw, haw, haw!" they went. They sounded as if they were inside a huge barrel.

"They're so damn smug," the tall one said.

They stopped at a corner where the wind came up cold and salty from the water. Above their heads a rusty sign swung slowly back and forth with long, melancholy groans.

"Reminds me of my grandfather's old farm," the tall one said. "It was by the sea. What a lonely place! Something used to creak like that all the time. The funny thing is I never found out what it was. Something loose high up among the eaves of the barns—like a creaking in the sky. It was the noise that made the place so lonely."

"They liked to have their offices on corners like this," the short one said. "You can see how that would be. Then people coming along both streets could see the signs on the windows, and people waiting for

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the light to change would look up and see them, and people getting off the buses—"

"There was a big book in the parlor with pictures—one book besides the Bible," the tall one went on. "I read it through every summer on rainy afternoons, because there was nothing else to do. It was called *The Holy War,* by a man named Bunyan. Imagine a name like Bunyan."

"*The Holy War,* eh." The short one stared hard at the second-story window openings, trying to see into the darkness of the rooms. "That's a good one. They were all holy wars."

"Unholy, you mean."

"Holy, unholy. What's the difference now."

The tall one looked at him for a moment. "Hurts, eh?"

"Like holy hell. Like someone was pounding it with a red-hot poker."

"You want me to try up there?" The tall one nodded toward the windows above their heads.

"Yeah—do you mind? I'll try the ones across the street."

They separated, the short one crossing the street, the tall one stepping right through a door that had once contained a full-length panel of glass. It was dark on the steps and pitch black in the upper hallway. He moved cautiously. You never could tell what you would stumble over in the darkness. And as he moved along the wall, he felt for doorknobs and each time he found one he swung the door open, letting in a shaft of gray light and the cool, strong wind. Papers and dust swirled down the hall behind him. Then he found what he was looking for—a door with a name, DR. EUGENE SPRAGUE, and under it the one word, DENTIST. He walked quickly through the waiting room with its wicker furniture and its moldy copies of *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Life* to the inner office, and there it was: the familiar chair, the adjustable round light—dead—the little trays and the basin with the hooked silver spout—dry—and swinging loose on its cantilever, with its little wheels and cords, that instrument of torture. Staring at that he suddenly remembered, years ago, when he was a small boy, the old dentist holding the drill daintily like a pencil and saying, "If they would just let me at Hitler with this for five minutes!" He had been shocked at the expression on the face of the old man dedicated to the easing of pain—the big outside hate breaking through to his little-boy world.

He walked over to the cabinet and began pulling out the small drawers until he found what he wanted, the squat, evil-beaked, silver-plated forceps. For a long moment he held the thing in his hand, looking at it, until his wrist began to ache and he realized that he had been gripping the handle with all his strength.

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He leaned out of the glassless window and, when his companion appeared on the sidewalk, he called down, "I've found it."

For half a minute the red face between the red hair and the red beard was turned up to him, and the words came reluctantly. "OK, I'll come up."

The man in the office turned around. He brushed away the cobwebs hanging between the arms of the chair, and swung it around to face the window sill; he opened the forceps and clamped it with gentle pressure onto the index finger of his left hand, after a while increasing the pressure until the pain grew intense. It hung there like a predatory bird. He shivered slightly and looked up to see the short one standing just inside the door with his eyes fixed on the forceps.

"Do you still want to go through with it?" the tall one said.

"Got to. No way out of it. Got to take out the tooth or chop off my head—it's one or the other." He came forward and rested his arm on the arm of the chair.

"I haven't the slightest idea of how to go about it, you know," the tall one said.

"There can't be much to it. Just get a good grip and pull. Let's see the damn thing." The man by the chair reached out for the forceps and turned it over and over, examining it with fascination. "They used to keep it out of sight," he said. "They'd come sidling up with one hand behind them, sort of absent-minded, and say, 'Open,' in a soft voice, and the next thing you knew your jaw was cracking in two—not hurting, just cracking and you could feel a big hunk of you leaving you." He looked up briefly. "That was all right with me then—not seeing it, I mean." He peered closer at the instrument in his hand. "You see those grooves?" He pointed with stubby fingers. "They're turned back like shark's teeth." He closed the forceps and rested his fingers on the curved space between the jaw. "Curved. To cup right around the tooth. There must be different ones for different teeth." He looked up again. "This the only one you found?"

"Yes, the only one."

"Well—" The short man fingered his beard with one hand, then handed over the forceps. For a few seconds he stood as if rooted, looking down at the seat of the chair. At last he seemed to jerk forward like a marionette; at the same time he reached into his breast pocket and pulled out a pint bottle of whisky. "I don't know whether this will really do any good. I read about it somewhere. I swallow as much as I can take in one long gulp and then, while my mouth is still open and I'm gasping for air, you yank her out."

"Why, that's no good," the tall man said. "No good at all. That isn't the way they did it. You drank

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and drank until you passed out. One swallow isn't going to help any."

The short man looked at him with helpless, appealing eyes. "Jesus," he said. "I don't think I can go through with it. I'm scared out of my wits." He pulled himself forward and sank into the seat. "I've gotten soft. We all got soft. All those drugs—aspirin, ether. They spoiled us. They used to tell me my great-aunt had all her lowers pulled out at one sitting by a horse doctor, without batting an eye."

"Well, I don't want to discourage you," the tall man said. "A long swig might help at that. It does sort of hit you like a sledge hammer—the whisky, I mean." He leaned forward. "Let me see the tooth again. I wouldn't want to pull out the wrong one." He grinned slightly.

The man in the chair opened his mouth and inserted a forefinger.

The other nodded. "Let me try the forceps on it—just for hold." There was a slight moisture on his forehead, which he wiped away with the back of his hand. He bent forward and inserted the forceps clumsily, turning it this way and that, his eye almost inside the stretched lips. "Can't you open any wider?" he said.

The red beard quivered violently and a faint squeak came from deep in the throat.

The tall man shifted his hold on the forceps to his left hand. Then he took it in both hands and began to pull.

"Feel anything?" he asked.

The short man shook his head.

The tall man braced a foot against the chair and leaned back slowly, his eyes resting on the eyes of the other. The face of the man in the chair began to get red again, and all at once he put up his hand.

The tall man straightened up. "I had a good grip on it," he said. "I should have yanked her out."

"Oh, no. Not before I get this whisky into me." The man in the chair lifted the bottle. His hand shook a little. He drew a deep breath, closed his eyes and tipped the bottle. As the fiery liquor ran down his throat his face grew a deeper and deeper red and the veins in his neck swelled. Suddenly he pulled the bottle away with a loud gasp, his mouth open, his lips drawn back, baring his teeth in a wide grin.

Swiftly the tall man leaned forward, both hands on the forceps. He was crouched over like a rigid question mark, his head sideways, his forehead brushed by the red beard. When he had the tooth in the forceps, he gripped the handle so hard that the muscles of his forearms bulged like tennis balls. His own lips drew back in a mimetic grin as tigerish as that of his patient. Bracing himself he gave the forceps a terrific jerk, and the man in the chair rose straight up on

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his arms, uttered an ear-splitting yell, and then slumped back against the padded seat.

"I got it," the tall one said, then stopped short, regarding the forceps. "Christ!" he said softly. "It must have broken off."

The crumpled figure in the chair stared with dismayed eyes at the forceps. After a while he pushed himself up straight. "It's no use," he said. "I can't go through with it again."

"Whisky didn't help much, eh?" The tall man carefully dropped the fragment of tooth onto the white glass tray.

"No." The redheaded man's face was as white as paper again. His eyes roved around the office, like the eye of a starving bird. Suddenly his glance stopped on a small object lying almost hidden among the cluster of bottles on the cabinet shelf. For a long moment he stared at it. Then a deep sigh that was almost a groan, but a groan of relief, escaped his lips.

His whole body seemed to relax, and his eyes grew bright and fresh like the eyes of a man suddenly coming out of a deep fever. "What have we been thinking of!" he exclaimed, and his voice was such a joy to hear that the tall man looked at him in sudden dismay. "All you have to do is give me a shot of novocain. There must be some around here somewhere." In a moment he was out of the chair fumbling among the innumerable little phials that filled the shelves of the cabinet. As he searched he mopped his forehead and neck with a handkerchief. "I can't find it," he said. "Where the devil did the bastard keep the stuff?"

"It doesn't matter," the other said. "If we don't find any here, we will in some other office."

Suddenly the short one held up a small green bottle. "Ah!" he said. He peered at the label with shining eyes. Then he held the bottle up to the light, staring at it as if it were the very elixir of life. With his free hand he reached for the needle.

"That will have to be sterilized," the tall one said.

"We could boil it."

The tall one shook his head. "Might break it, and then where would we be?"

The short one looked around. He spied a bottle of alcohol. "Here we are," he said. "This will do the trick."

Back in the chair, he waited, relaxed, while the tall man, holding the needle gingerly, peered into his mouth. Then he shifted his head away slightly and said, "Don't drop it whatever you do."

The tall one moved the needle slowly in. "I think about there," he said.

"You make a little ring of them right around the tooth," the short one said, gripping the arms of the chair again.

The tall one held the needle as if it were a coral snake that might

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turn around and sting him in the finger. "Ready?" he asked.

The short one nodded. He quivered slightly as the needle went home. His eyes were wide open, staring at the ceiling.

The tall one stood back and the air escaped from his lungs with a loud gasp. "So far, so good," he said.

"I think it's going to work," the short one said.

"Let's not count our chickens." The tall one inserted the needle again. He made four insertions, using up all the novocain in the little bottle. Then he sat back on the window ledge and lit a cigarette. His hand shook like a leaf. "How does it feel?" he asked.

The other probed his gums with his finger. "Fine," he said. "I don't feel a thing. You've froze it up good. It feels like a hunk of cement."

"All right. Let's go." The tall one tossed his cigarette out into the street and picked up the forceps. He worked away at the other's mouth, then leaned back for a moment, breathing hard.

"I think you're beginning to enjoy this," the man in the chair said.

"I've lost about five pounds, that's all." The tall man leaned forward. "Here, open your damn trap." He worked away some more. Once he started to pull, but the forceps slipped off and he cursed softly. He tried again, pulling gently and then with all his strength. The man in the chair grew as rigid as a board. Suddenly the forceps came away, and there before their eyes was the source of evil—the yellowish brown tooth, blunt, decayed, one corner broken. They bent over it curiously. At the root was a white pustule.

The man in the chair leaned over and spat into the basin. His face was radiant. "I'm a new man," he said. "I feel like a million dollars." He stepped down from the chair.

"If you don't mind," the tall one said, "I'll take a swig from that bottle."

"Why, sure." The short one thrust out the bottle. "Take it all. Anything I have is yours. You saved my life."

"The novocain did the trick," the tall one said. "You thank the man who invented the novocain." He tipped the bottle and swallowed.

"By God, I do—with all my heart. Of all the men who ever lived—"

They walked out through the door and down the dark stairway. "I guess you *did* suffer more than I did," the short one said.

"I sweated a little. I hope you'll do the same for me some day."

"We ought to eat nuts and roots instead of all this canned stuff. We got to live more like animals."

"You know I even think I could handle that drill," the tall one said.

They came out onto the street and stood for a moment on the corner.

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"What street is this anyway?" the short one said. "It might be good to know."

"I doubt we'll ever pass here again." The tall man peered up at the sign. "Broadway and One Hundred and Twenty-fifth," he said.

The short one pulled up his coat collar. "It's gotten dark," he said, "and colder."

"Yes." The tall one looked up at the gray sky. "We've stayed up here long enough. It's about time to go South."

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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

THE BEST OF BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION is characterized by a quietly convincing detailed factuality unmatched by writers in any other country. This tradition may well derive from Daniel Defoe, although he never, strictly speaking, wrote s.f. It marked the work of H. G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon and such unexpected venturers into the future as R. C. Sherriff (THE HOPKINS MANUSCRIPT, 1939), Michael Arlen (MAN'S MORTALITY, 1933) and Storm Jameson (IN THE SECOND YEAR, 1936). Today it is the element which places in the first rank of science fiction writers Arthur C. Clarke, John Wyndham . . . and now John Christopher.

Christopher's NO BLADE OF GRASS (Simon & Schuster, $2.95*), published last year in England as THE DEATH OF GRASS, is probably the most financially successful s.f. novel of recent (or conceivably any) times, with seven-part serialization in the *Saturday Evening Post* and prepublication sale to M-G-M for a major-budget production. And unlike so much "s.f." successful outside of the field, it is the genuine goods, an authentic masterpiece of extrapolative fiction to set beside the very best of Clarke or Wyndham.

A new virus destroys all plants of the family *Gramineae*—which includes not only what laymen think of as grasses, but also rice and wheat, the staple foods of East and West. As civilization crumbles, a London architect sets out on a trek across England to lead his family to the possible haven of a defensible farm in a northern valley; gradually he finds himself perforce changing from a quiet man of goodwill into a logical, remorseless feudal chieftain, guided solely by the needs of his people.

This is a richly developed novel of character, sustained by powerful and even shocking action against a background of faultless scientific and sociological thought, and told with relentlessly compelling understatement—in brief, everything that the modern novel of the imagination should be.

Neville Shute's ON THE BEACH (Morrow, $3.95*) is another quiet novel of future disaster, with the significant difference that I, at least, could not find it compelling or indeed even credible. This is probably a minority report: reviews

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have not yet appeared as I write this, but prepublication excitement is great in the trade. The novel deals with the year 1963, when a certain carelessness with cobalt bombs has wiped out human life in Earth's northern hemisphere, and the southern half of the globe awaits its slow destruction as the fall-out drifts down latitude by latitude.

The likelihood of this neat arrangement in the spherical geometry of death I shall leave to the meteorologists; what I refuse to believe is the reactions attributed to the surviving fraction of mankind. (What we are shown is Melbourne, in southernmost Australia, but we also hear about Latin America and South Africa.) *"In this last of meeting places . . . gathered on this shore of the tumid river"* (to quote the lines from Eliot's *The Hollow Men* which give the book its title), man, knowing for some 20 months precisely when and how the end of his race will come, does nothing, good or bad. One might fear outbreaks of crime, violence, hysteria, panic flight, disruption of government, revolution. One might hope for some signs of deathbed spiritual regeneration. One would certainly expect a half world-wide union of all governments and scientists in a tremendous crash program of research to find some conceivable means, from Antarctic subterranean shelters to a gamble on spaceflight, whereby the life of the race might be preserved.

But every character in the book, down to the smallest bit parts, and apparently every offstage survivor as well, does nothing but Carry On, with the traditional Stiff Upper Lip and the resolute motto of Business as Usual. People live in their own fantasies, planting crops that will not be reaped, manufacturing goods that will never be needed, obeying laws and customs that no longer have meaning, until one feels that the only rational man left in the world is the aged statesman who is at least determined to drink up his club's stock of rare port before the end. When finally the commander of a U. S. atomic sub, dying of radiation sickness, gallantly takes his ship out to sea and sinks it because it is a classified vessel and must not be left in a foreign harbor, one feels something of the nausea which is a symptom of the fatal disease.

This is, I submit, mere tear-jerking bathos. Man may die badly or well (and probably will do both), but not mawkishly.

Briefer notes to the extent that space permits:

SUBI: THE VOLCANO, by Burt Cole (Macmillan, $3.75*). Another novel of world war in the 1960's. Future fiction, but hardly s.f.; it could be about any war, anywhere, at any time—which is, indeed, the point of this taut, violent yet subtle first novel.

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THE GREEN ODYSSEY, by Philip José Farmer (Ballantine, $2.75*; paper, 35¢). Saga of escape by land-sailing windjammers across the vast plains of a colorful feudal planet. Wonderfully lusty and roistering adventure story, with a shrewd hero, a magnificent heroine, and acutely inserted s.f. details —one of the year's most entertaining tales.

PEOPLE MINUS X, by Raymond Z. Gallun (Simon & Schuster, $3*). Mr. Gallun made his debut in *Wonder* in 1929, and seems engaged here in a nostalgic effort to return s.f. to the standards of that period.

RE-ENTER FU MANCHU, by Sax Rohmer (Gold Medal, 35¢). The insidious doctor returns (after 9 years' absence) with inventions which "would have puzzled any living scientist," including an invulnerable defense against H-bombs. Minor, but still fun.

JULES VERNE: MASTER OF SCIENCE FICTION, edited by I. O. Evans (Rinehart, $3*). Short selections from 14 *Voyages Extraordinaires,* stressing the elements of science and prophecy (which date badly) rather than humor and storytelling (which do not). The translations are the original barely passing-French-I hackwork. ("'Boiling water!' murmured he.") Valuable to specialists for its material from such otherwise forgotten and unobtainable *Voyages* as THE STEAM HOUSE, with its splendid robot elephant, and THE CHILD OF THE CAVERN.

COLONIAL SURVEY, by Murray Leinster (Gnome, $3*). 4 novelets from *Astounding,* 1956. Good solid ingenious specimens of the "heavy science" story, if credulity-straining in their underlying assumption that "a planet" is more geophysically homogeneous than any continent on Earth.

TWO SOUGHT ADVENTURE, by Fritz Leiber (Gnome, $3*). 7 shorts and novelets of the adventures of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser during the Time of Decadence of the land of Nehwon, mostly from *Unknown,* 1939-1942. In Leiber's Robert E. Howard - Clark Ashton Smith vein, which has its admirers.

A PAUSE IN THE DESERT, by Oliver La Farge (Houghton Mifflin, $3.50*). Distinguished and varied volume of short stories, largely from *The New Yorker,* including one s.f. (from F&SF) and three fantasies. La Farge's contributions to our genre are infrequent but of the highest quality. Strongly recommended.

** Books marked with an asterisk may be ordered through F&SF's Readers' Book Service. For details, see page 4.*

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Perhaps the thought has at times occurred to you that you yourself, if given the opportunity, could do an incomparably better job of coping with the Hokas than Plenipotentiary Alexander Jones. You'd simply be very firm, reasonable, let's-have-no-nonsense; and that would be that. It's a thought that has certainly occurred frequently to Alex's charming wife Tanni; and now at last she has a chance to put her theory to the test in the first Hoka story in which the Plenipotentiary does not appear—a story of Hokan India, of other extraterrestrials and their cultures, of interstellar honor, and of the Law of the Pack.

Full Pack (Hokas Wild)

by POUL ANDERSON AND GORDON R. DICKSON

When one is a regular ambassador to a civilized planet with full membership in the Interbeing League, it is quite sufficient to marry a girl who is only blond and beautiful. However, a plenipotentiary, guiding a backward world along the tortuous path to modern culture and full status, needs a wife who is also competent to handle the unexpected.

Alexander Jones had no reason to doubt that his Tanni met all the requirements of blondness, beauty and competence. Neither did she. After a dozen years on Toka, he did not hesitate to leave her in charge while he took a native delegation to Earth and arranged for the planet's advancement in grade. And for a while things went smoothly—as smoothly, at least, as they can go on a world of eager, energetic teddy bears with imaginations active to the point of autohypnosis.

Picture her, then, on a sunny day shortly after lunch, walking through her official residence in the city Mixumaxu. Bright sunshine streamed through the glassite wall, revealing a pleasant view of cobbled streets, peaked roofs, and the grim towers of the Bastille. (This was annually erected by the self-appointed Roi Soleil, and torn down again by happy sans-culottes every July 14.) Tanni Jones's

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brief tunic and long golden hair were in the latest Bangkok fashion, even on this remote outpost, and her slim tanned figure would never be outmoded and she was comfortably aware of the fact. She had just checked the nursery, finding her two younger children safe at play. A newly arrived letter from her husband was tucked into her bosom. It announced in one sentence that his mission had been successful; thereafter several pages were devoted to more important matters, such as his imminent return with a new fur coat and he wished he could have been in the envelope and meanwhile he loved her madly, passionately, etc. She was murmuring to herself. Let us listen.

"Damn and blast it to hell, anyway! Where *is* that little monster?"

As she passed the utility room, a small, round-bellied, yellow-furred ursinoid popped out. This was Carruthers. His official title was Secretary-in-Chief-to-the-Plenipotentiary, which meant whatever Carruthers decided it should mean. Tanni felt relieved that today he was dressed merely in anachronistic trousers, spats, coat, and bowler hat, umbrella furled beneath one arm, and spoke proper Oxford English. Last week it had been a toga, and he had brought her messages written in Latin with Greek characters; he had also buttonholed every passerby with the information that she, Tanni, was above suspicion.

"The newsfax sheet, madam," he bowed. "Just came off the jolly old printer, don't y' know."

"Oh. Thanks." She took the bulletin and swept her eyes down it. Sensational tidings from Earth Headquarters: the delegates from Worben and Porkelans accused of conspiracy; Goldfarb's Planet awarded to Bagdadburgh; a League-wide alert for a Starflash space yacht which had been seen carrying the Tertiary Receptacle of Wisdom of Sanussi and the as-yet-unidentified dastards who had kidnaped him from his planet's Terrestrial embassy; commercial agreement governing the xisfthikl traffic signed between Jruthn and Ptrfsk—Tanni handed it back. There were too many worlds for anyone to remember; none of the names meant a thing to her.

"Carruthers," she asked, "have you seen Alexander?"

"The young master, madam?" Carruthers screwed a monocle into one beady black eye and tapped his short muzzle with the umbrella handle. "Why, yes, I do believe so, eh, what, what, what?"

"Well, where is he?"

"He asked me not to tell, madam." Carruthers eyed her reproachfully. "Couldn't peach on him, now could I? Old School Tie and all that sort of bally old—"

Tanni stalked off with the secretary still bleating behind her.

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True, she thought, her children did attend the same school which educated the adult Hokas, but—Hah! In a way, it was too bad Alex was returning so soon. She had long felt that he didn't take a firm enough line with his mercurial charges. He was too easily reduced to gibbering bewilderment. Now she was made of sterner stuff, and—In a Boadicean mood, she swept through a glassite passageway to the flitter garage.

Yes, there was her oldest son, Alexander Braithwaite Jones, Jr., curled up on the front seat with his nose buried in an ancient but well-preserved folio volume. She much regretted giving it to him. Her idea had been that he could carry it under one arm and enjoy it between bouts of healthful outdoor play, rather than having to sit hunched over a microset; but all he did was read it, sneaking off to places like—

"Alexander!"

The boy, a nine-year-old, tangle-haired pocket edition of his father, started guiltily. "Oh, hello, Mom," he smiled. It quite melted her resolve.

"Now, Alex," said Tanni in a reasonable tone, "you know you ought to be out getting some exercise. You've already read those *Jungle Books* a dozen times."

"Aw, golly, Mom," protested the younger generation. "You give me a book and then you won't let me read it!"

"Alexander!" Boadicea had returned in full armor. "You know perfectly well what I mean. Now I told you to—"

"Madam," squeaked a voice, "the devil's to pay!"

Tanni yipped and jumped. Remembering herself, she turned in a suitably dignified manner to see Carruthers, hastily clad in pith helmet and fake walrus mustache.

"Message on the transtype just came," said the Hoka. "From Injah, don't y' know. Seems a bit urgent."

Tanni snatched the paper he extended and read:

FROM: *Captain O'Neil of the Black Tyrone*

TO: *Rt. Hon. Plen. A. Jones*

SUBJECT: *UFO (Unidentified Flying Object) identified*

Your Excellency:

While burying dead and bolting beef north of the Kathun road, received word from native scout of UFO crashed in jungle nearby containing three beasts of unknown origin. Interesting, what?

Yr. Humble & Obt. Svt., etc.,
"Crook" O'Neil

For a moment Tanni had a dreamlike sense of unreality. Then, slowly, she translated the Hokaese. Yes . . . there were some Hokas from this northern hemisphere who had moved down to the subcontinent due south which the natives had gleefully rechristened India, and set themselves up as Imperialists. The Indians were quite

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happy to cooperate, since it meant that they could wear turbans and mysterious expressions. Vaguely she recalled Kipling's *Ballad of Boh Da Thone*. It dealt with Burma, to be sure, but if consistency is the virtue of little minds, then the Hokas were very large-minded indeed. India was mostly Kipling country, with portions here and there belonging to Clive, the Grand Mogul, and lesser lights.

The UFO must be a spaceship and the "beasts," of course, its crew, from some other planet. God alone knew what they would think if the Indians located them first and assumed they were—*what* would Hokas convinced they were Hindus, Pathans, and Britishers imagine alien space travelers to be?

"Carruthers!" said Tanni sharply. "Has there been any distress call on the radio?"

"No, madam, there has not. And damme, I don't like it. Don't like it at all. When I was with Her Majesty's Very Own Royal, Loyal, and Excessively Brave Fifth Fusiliers, I—"

Tanni's mind worked swiftly. This was just the sort of situation in which Alex, Sr., was always getting involved and coming off second best. It was her chance to show him how these matters ought to be handled.

"Carruthers," she snapped, "you and I will take the flitter and go to the rescue of these aliens. And I want it clearly understood that—"

"Mom! Can I go? Can I go, huh, Mom, can I?"

It was Alex, Jr., hopping up and down with excitement, his eyes shining.

"No," began Tanni. "You stay here and read your book and—" She checked herself, aware of the pitfall. Countermanding her own orders! Here was a heaven-sent opportunity to get the boy out of the house and interested in something new—like, for example, these castaways. They were clearly beings of authority or means, important beings, or they could not afford a private spaceship. There was no danger involved; Toka's India was a land of congenial climate, without any life-forms harmful to man.

"You can go," she told Alex severely, "if you'll do exactly as I say at all times. Now that means exactly!"

"Yes, yes, yes. Sure, Mom, sure."

"All right, then," said Tanni. She ran back into the house, making hasty arrangements with the servants, while Carruthers set the flitter's autopilot to locating the British bivouac. In minutes two humans and one Hoka were skyborne.

The camp proved to be a collection of tents set among fronded trees and tangled vines, drowsy under the late-afternoon sun. A radio and a transtype were the only modern equipment, a reluctant

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concession to the plenipotentiary's program of technological education. They stood at the edge of the clearing, covered with jungle mold, while the Black Tyrone, a hundred strong, drilled with musket, fife, and drum.

Captain O'Neil was a grizzled, hard-bitten Hoka in shorts, tunic and bandolier. He limped across the clearing, with helmet in hand, as Tanni emerged from the flitter with Alex and Carruthers.

"Honored, ma'am," he bowed. "Pardon my one-sided gait, ma'am. Caught a slug in the ulnar bone recently." (Tanni knew very well he had not; there was no war on Toka, and anyway the ulnar bone is in the arm.) "Now, a slug that is hammered from telegraph wire —ah, a book?"

His eyes lit up with characteristic enthusiasm, and Tanni, looking around, discovered the reason in her son's arms.

"Alex!" she said. "Did you bring that *Jungle Books* thing along?" His downcast face told her that he had. "I'm not going to bother with it any longer. You hand that right over to Captain O'Neil and let him keep it for you till we leave for home again."

"Awwwww, Mom!"

"Right now!"

"—is a thorn in the flesh and a rankling fire," murmured Captain O'Neil. "Ah, thank you, m' boy. Well, well, what have we here? *The Jungle Books,* by Rudyard Kipling himself! Never seen 'em before." Humming a little tune, he opened the volume.

"Now, where is that UFO?" demanded Tanni. "Have you rescued its crew yet?"

"No, ma'am," said the Captain, with his nose between the pages. "Going to go look for 'em this morning, but we were hanging Danny Deever and—" His voice trailed off into a mumble.

Tanni compressed her lips. "Well, we shall have to find them," she clipped. "Is it far? Should we go overland or take the flitter?"

"Er . . . yes, ma'am? Ha, hum," said O'Neil, closing the book reluctantly but marking the place with a furry forefinger. "Not far. Overland, I would recommend. You'd find landing difficult in our jungles here in the Seeonee Hills—"

"The what?"

"Er . . . I mean north of the Kathun road. A wolf . . . I mean, a native scout brought us the word. Perhaps you'd care to talk to him, ma'am?"

"I would," said Tanni. "Right away."

O'Neil shouted for Gunga Din and sent him off to look, then dove back into the volume. Presently another Hoka slouched from behind a tent. He was of the local race, which had fur of midnight black, but was otherwise indistinguishable from the portly Northern variety. Unless, of course, you

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specified his costume: turban, baggy trousers, loose shirt, assorted cutlery thrust into a sash, and a flaming red false beard. He salaamed.

"What's your name?" asked Tanni.

"Mahbub Ali, memsahib," replied the newcomer. "Horse trader."

"You saw the ship land?"

"Yes, memsahib. I had stopped to patch my bridles and count my gear—whee, a book!"

"It's mine!" said O'Neil, pulling it away from him.

"Oh. Well, ah—" Mahbub Ali edged around so that he could read over the Captain's shoulder. "I, er, saw the thing flash through the air and went to see. I, um, glimpsed three beasts of a new sort coming out, but, um, they went back inside before I could . . . By that time the moon was shining into the cave where I lived and I said to myself, 'Augrh!' I said, 'it is time to hunt again—' "

"Gentlebeings!" cried Tanni. The book snapped shut and two fuzzy faces looked dreamily up at her. "I shall want the regiment to escort me to that ship tomorrow."

"Why, er, to be sure, ma'am," said O'Neil vaguely. "I'll tell the pack and we'll move out at dawn."

A couple of extra tents were set up in the clearing, and there was a supper at which the humans shared top honors with Danny Deever. (A Hoka's muscles are so strong that hanging does not injure him.) When night fell, with subtropical swiftness, Alex crawled into one tent and Tanni into the other. She lay for a while, thinking cheerfully that her theories of management were bearing fruit. True, there had been some small waverings on the part of the autochthones, but she had kept things rolling firmly in the proper direction. Why in the Galaxy did her husband insist it was so difficult to . . .

The last thing she remembered as she drifted into sleep was the murmur of a voice from the campfire. "Crook" O'Neil had assembled his command and was reading to them. . . .

She blinked her eyes open to dazzling sunlight. Dawn was hours past, and a great stillness brooded over the clearing. More indignant than alarmed, she scrambled out of her sleeping bag, threw on tunic and shoes, and went into the open.

The camp was deserted. Uniforms and equipment were piled by the cold ashes of the fire, and a flying snake was opening a can of bully beef with its saw-edged beak. For a moment the world wavered before her.

"Alex!" she screamed.

Running from tent to tent, she found them all empty. She remembered wildly that she did not even have a raythrower along. Sobbing,

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she dashed toward the flitter—get an aerial view—

Brush crackled, and a round black-nosed head thrust cautiously forth. Tanni whirled, blinked, and recognized the gray-shot pelt of O'Neil.

"Captain!" she gasped. "What's happened? Come out this minute!"

The brush parted, and the Hoka trotted out on all fours, attired in nothing but his own fur.

"Captain O'Neil!" wailed Tanni. "What's the meaning of this?"

The native reached up, got the hem of her tunic between his jaws, and tugged. Then he let go and moved toward the canebrake, looking back at her.

"Captain," said Tanni helplessly. She followed him for a moment, then stopped. Her voice grew shrill. "I'm not moving another centimeter till you explain this—this outrageous—" The Hoka waddled back to her. "Well, speak up! Don't whine at me! Stand up and talk like a . . . like a . . . a Captain. *And stop licking my hand!*"

O'Neil headed into the jungle. Tanni gave up. Throttling her fears, she went after him. Colorful birds whistled overhead, and flowers drooped on long vines and snagged in her hair. Presently she found herself on a trail. It ran for some two kilometers, an uneventful trip except for the pounding of her heart and the Captain's tendency to dash off after small game.

At the end, they reached a meadow surrounding a large flat-topped rock. The Black Tyrone were there. Like their commander, they had stripped off their uniforms and now frisked about in the grass, tumbling like puppies and snarling between their teeth. She caught fragments of continuous conversation:

"—Sambhur belled, once, twice, and again . . . wash daily from nose-tip to tail-tip . . . the meat is very near the bone—" and other interesting though possibly irrelevant information.

Rolling about, Tanni's eyes found her son. He was seated on top of the rock, wearing only a wreath of flowers and a kitchen knife on a string about his neck. At his feet, equally nude and happy, sprawled Carruthers and the black-furred Mahbub Ali.

"Alex!" cried Tanni. She sped to the rock and stared up at her offspring, uncertain whether to kiss and cry over him or turn him across her knee. "What are you doing here?"

Captain O'Neil spoke for the first time. "Thy mother was doubtful about coming, Little Frog."

"Oh, so you *can* talk!" said Tanni, glaring at him.

"He can't talk to you, Mom," said Alex.

"What do you mean, he can't?"

"But that's wolf talk, Mom. You can't understand it. I'll have to translate for you."

"Wolf?"

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"The Seeonee Pack," said Alex proudly. He nodded at O'Neil. "Thou hast done well, Akela."

"Argh!" said Mahbub Ali. *"I* run with no pack, Little Frog."

"By the Bull that bought me!" exclaimed Alex, contrite. "I forgot, Bagheera." He stroked the black head. "This is Bagheera, Mom, the Black Panther, you know." Pointing to the erstwhile Carruthers: "And this is Baloo the Bear. And I'm Mowgli. Isn't it terrific, Mom?"

"No, it isn't!" snapped Tanni. Now, if ever, was the time to take the strong line she believed in. "Captain O'Neil, will you stop being Akela this minute? I'm here to rescue some very important people, and—"

"What says thy mother Messua?" asked the Captain—or, rather, Akela—lolling out his tongue and looking at Mowgli-Alex.

The boy started gravely to translate.

"Alex, stop that!" Tanni found her voice wobbling. "Don't encourage him in this . . . this game!"

"But it isn't a game, Mom," protested her son. "It's real. Honest!"

"You know it isn't," scolded Tanni. "He's not really Akela at all. He should be sensible and go back to being himself."

"Himself?" murmured Baloo-Carruthers, forgetting in his surprise that he wasn't supposed to understand English.

"Captain O'Neil," explained Tanni, holding on to her patience with both hands. "Captain—"

"But he wasn't really Captain O'Neil either," pointed out Baloo.

On many occasions Tanni had listened sympathetically, but with a hidden sense of superiority, to her husband's description of his latest encounter with Hoka logic. She had never really believed in all the dizzy sensations he spoke of. Now she felt them. She gasped feebly and sat down in the grass.

"I wanted to let you know, Mom," chattered Alex. "The Pack's got Shere Khan treed a little ways from here. I wanted to know if it was all right for me to go call him a Lame Thief of the Waingunga. Can I, Mom, huh, can I?"

Tanni drew a long, shuddering breath. She remembered Alex, Sr.'s advice: "Roll with the punches. Play along and watch for a chance to use their own logic on them." There didn't seem to be anything else to do at the moment. "All right," she whispered.

Akela took the lead, yapping; Baloo and Bagheera closed in on either side of Alex; and the Pack followed. Brush crackled. It was not easy for a naturally bipedal species to go on all fours, and Tanni saw Akela walking erect when he thought she wasn't looking. He caught her eye, blushed under his fur, and crouched down again.

She decided that this new lunacy would prove rather unstable. It just wasn't practical to run around

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on your hands and try to bring down game with your teeth. But it would probably take days for the Hokas to weary of the sport and return to being the Black Tyrone, and meanwhile what was she to do?

"By the Broken Lock that freed me!" exclaimed Bagheera, coming to a halt. "One approaches—I mean approacheth."

"Two approach," corrected Baloo, sitting up on his haunches bear-fashion. Being an ursinoid, he did this rather well.

Tanni looked ahead. Through a clump of bamboo-like plants emerged a black-haired form with a blunt snout under heavy brow ridges, the size of a man but stooped over, long arms dangling past bent knees. He wore a sadly stained and ragged suit. She recognized him as a native of the full-status planet Chakba. Behind him lifted the serpentine head of a being from some world unknown to her.

Akela bristled. "The Bandar-log!" he snarled.

"But see," pointed Baloo, "Kaa the Python follows him, and yet the shameless Bandar is not afraid." He scratched his head. "This is not supposed to be," he said plaintively.

The Chakban spotted Tanni and hurried toward her. "Ah, dear lady," he cried. His voice was high-pitched, but he spoke fluent English. "At last, a civilized face!" He bowed. "Permit me to introduce myself. I am Echpo of Doralik-Li, and my poor friend is named Seesis."

Tanni, glancing at the friend in question, was moved to agree that he was, indeed, poor. Seesis had come into full view now, revealing ten meters of snake body, limbless except for two delicate arms just under the big bald head. A pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez wobbled on his nose. He hissed dolefully and undulated toward the girl, wringing his small hands.

Tanni gave her name and asked: "Are you the beings who crash-landed here?"

"Yes, dear lady," said Echpo. "A most—"

Seesis tugged at the girl's tunic and began to scratch on the ground with his forefinger.

"What?" Tanni bent over to look.

"Poor chap, poor chap," said Echpo, shaking his head. "He doesn't speak English, you know. Moreover, the crash . . ." He revolved a finger near his own right temple and gave her a meaningful look.

"Oh, how terrible!" Tanni got to her feet in spite of Seesis' desperate efforts to hold her down and make her look at his dirt scratchings. "We'll have to get him to a doctor—Dr. Arrowsmith in Mixumaxu is really very good if I can drag him away from discovering bacteriophage—"

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"That is not necessary, madam," said Echpo. "Seesis will recover naturally. I know his race. But if I may presume upon your kindness, we do need transportation."

The Hokas crowded around Seesis, addressing him as Kaa and asking him if he was casting his skin and obliterating his marks on the ground. The herpetoid seemed ready to burst into tears.

"But weren't there three of you?" asked Tanni.

"Yes, indeed," said Echpo. "But —well—I am afraid, dear lady, that your little friends do not seem to approve of our companion Heragli. They have, er, chased him up a tree."

"Why, how could they?" Gently, Tanni detached the fingers of Seesis from her skirt, patted him on his scaly head, and turned an accusing eye on Alex. "Young man, what do you know about this?"

The boy squirmed. "That must be Shere Khan." Defiantly: "He does look like a tiger too." He glared at Echpo. "Believe thou not the Bandar-log."

"These gentlebeings are no such thing!" snapped Tanni.

"Surely thy mother has been bitten by Tabaqui, the Jackal," said Baloo to Alex. "All the Jungle knows Shere Khan."

"This is *dewanee,* the madness," agreed Bagheera. "Heed thy old tutor who taught thee the Law, Little Frog."

"But—" began Alex. "But the hairy one dares say that—"

"Surely, Little Brother," interrupted Baloo, "thou hast learned by this time to take no notice of the Bandar-log. They have no Law. They are very many, evil, dirty, shameless, and they desire, if they have any fixed desire, to be noticed by the Jungle-People. But we do *not* notice them even when they throw nuts and filth on our heads."

"Oh!" groaned Echpo. "That I, an ex-cabinet minister of the Chakban Federation, B.A., M.S., Ph.D., LL.D., graduate of Hasolbath, Trmp, and the Sorbonne, should be accused of throwing nuts and filth on people's heads to attract attention!"

"I'm *so* sorry!" apologized Tanni. "It's the imagination these Hokas have. Please, please forgive them, sir!"

"Your lightest whim, dear lady, is my most solemn command and highest joy," bowed Echpo.

Tanni returned gallantly to the subject: "But how did you happen to be marooned here?"

"Ah . . . we were outward bound, madam, on a mission from Earth to the Rim Stars." Echpo produced a box of lozenges and politely offered them around. "A cultural mission, headed by our poor friend Seesis—is he bothering you, dear lady? Just slap his hands down. The shock, you know . . . Ah . . . A most important and urgent mission, I may say with all

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due modesty, undertaken to—pardon me, I cannot say more. Our converter began giving trouble as we passed near this sun, so we approached your planet—Toka, is that the name?—to get help. We knew from the pilot's manual that it had civilization, though we scarcely expected such delightful company as yours. At any rate, the converter failed us completely as we were entering the atmosphere, and though we glided down, the landing was still hard enough to wreck our communications equipment. That was yesterday, and today we were setting out in quest of help—we had seen from the air that there is a city some fifty kilometers hence—when, ah, your Hokas appeared and our poor friend Heragli—"

"Oh, dear!" said Tanni. "We'd better go get him right away. Can you guide me?"

"I should be honored," said Echpo. "I know the very tree."

"Does thy mother hunt with the Bandar-log, O Mowgli?" inquired Akela.

"Certainly not!" snapped Tanni, whirling on him. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Captain."

"What says she?" asked Akela agreeably.

Alex repeated it for him.

"Oh!" said Tanni, stamping off.

"Ah . . . poor dear Seesis," murmured Echpo. "He should not be left unguarded. He could hurt himself. Would your, ah, Hokas watch him while we rescue Heragli?"

"Of course," said Tanni. "Alex, you stay here and see to it."

The boy protested, was *Alexander*'d down, and gave in and announced importantly that he, the Man-Cub, wished the Pack to remain with him and not let Kaa depart. Tanni and Echpo started into the woods. Baloo and Bagheera followed.

"Hey, there!" said the girl. "Didn't Mowgli tell you to—"

"By the Broken Lock that freed me," squeaked Bagheera, slapping his paunch with indignation, "dost thou take *us* for wolves?"

Tanni sighed and traded a glance with Echpo. As they went among the trees, she calmed down enough to say: "I can fly you to Mixumaxu, of course, and put you up; but it may take weeks before you can get off the planet. Not many deep-space ships stop here."

"Oh, dear." The Chakban wrung hairy hands. "Our mission is *so* vital. Could we not even get transportation to Gelkar?"

"Well . . ." Tanni considered. "Why, yes, it's only a few light-years off. I can take you myself in our courier boat, and you can charter a ship there."

"Blessed damosel, my gratitude knows no limits," said Echpo.

Tanni preened herself. She was no snob, but certainly a favor done for beings as important as these would hurt no one's career.

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Through the ruffling leaves, she heard a hoarse, angry bellow. "That must be your friend," she remarked brightly, or as brightly as possible when battling through a humid jungle with hair uncombed and no breakfast. "What did you say his name was?"

"Heragli. A Rowra of Drus. A most gentlemanly felino-centauroid, dear lady. I can't conceive why your Hokas insist on chasing him up trees."

A minute later the girl saw him, perched in the branches seven meters above ground. She had to admit that he was not unlike a tiger. The long, black-striped orange body was there, and the short yellow-eyed head, though a stumpy torso with two muscular arms was between. His whiskers were magnificent, and a couple of saber teeth did the resemblance no harm. Like Echpo, he wore the thorn-ripped tatters of a civilized business suit.

"Heragli, dear friend," called the Chakban, "I have found a most agreeable lady who has graciously promised to help us."

"Are those unprintables around?" floated down a bass rumble. "Every blanked time I set foot to earth, the thus-and-so's have gone for me."

"It's all right!" snapped Tanni. She was not, she told herself, a prude; but Heragli's language was scarcely what she had been led to expect from the Bandar's—oops!—from Echpo's description of him as a most gentlemanly felino-centauroid.

"Why, sputter dash censored!" rasped the alien. "I see two of 'em just behind you!"

"Oh, them?" said Tanni. "Never mind them. They're only a bear and a black panther."

"They're *what?*"

"They're . . . well . . . oh, never mind! Come on down."

Heragli descended, two meters of rippling muscle hot in the leaf-filtered sunlight. "Very well, very well," he grumbled. "But I don't trust 'em. Lick my weight in flaming wildcats, but these asterisk unmentionables wreck my nerves. Where's the snake?"

Echpo winced. "My dear fellow!" he protested delicately.

"All right, all right!" bawled the Rowra. "The herpetoid, then. Don't hold with these dashed euphemisms. Call an encarnadined spade a cursed spade is my way. Where is he?"

"We left him back at—"

"Should've knocked'm on the mucking head. Said so all along. Save all this deleted trouble."

Echpo flinched again. "The, ah, the Rowra is an old military felino-centauroid," he explained hastily. "Believes in curing shock with counter-shock. Isn't that right, Heragli?"

"What? What're you babbling about now? Oh . . . oh, yes. Your servant, ma'am," thundered the

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other. "Which bleeding way out, eh?"

"A rough exterior, dear lady," whispered Echpo in Tanni's ear, "but a heart of gold."

"That may be," answered the girl sharply. "but I'm going to have to ask him to moderate his voice and expurgate his language. What if the Hokas should hear him?"

"Blunderbore and killecrantz!" swore Heragli. "Let'm hear. I've had enough of this deifically anathematized tree climbing. Let'm show up once more and I'll gut 'em, I'll skin 'em, I'll—"

A chorus of falsetto wolfish howls interrupted him, and a second later the space around the tree was filled with leaping, yelling Hokas and the Rowra was up in the branches again.

"Come down, Striped Killer!" bawled Akela, bounding a good two meters up the trunk. "Come down ere I forget wolves cannot climb! I myself will tear thy heart out!"

"Sput! Meowr!" snarled Heragli, swiping a taloned paw at him. "Meeourl spss rowul rhnrrrr!"

"What's he saying?" demanded Tanni.

"Dear lady," replied Echpo with a shudder, "don't ask. General! General!—His old rank may snap him out of it—General, remember your duty!"

"LAME THIEF OF THE WAINGUNGA!" shouted Alex, bombarding him with fallen fruits.

Heragli closed his eyes and panted. "Oh, m' nerves!" he gasped above the roar of the Hokas. "All your fault, Echpo, you insisting on no side-arms. Of all the la-di-da conspir—"

"General!" cried the Chakban.

Tanni struggled around the Hokas and collared her son. "Alex," she said ominously, "I told you to keep them away."

"But they outvoted me, Mom," he answered. "They're the Free People, you know, and it's the full Pack—"

"FOR THE PACK, FOR THE FULL PACK, IT IS MET!" chorused the Hokas, leaping up and snapping at Heragli's tail.

Tanni put her hands over her ears and tried to think. It hurt her pride, but she sought desperately to imagine what Alex, Sr., would have done. Play along with them . . . use their own fantasy . . . yes, and she had read the *Jungle Books* herself—Ah!

She snatched a nut from her boy just before he launched it and said sweetly: "Alex, dear, shouldn't the Pack be in bed now?"

"Huh, Mom?"

"Doesn't the Law of the Jungle say so? Ask Baloo."

"Indeed, Man-Cub," replied Baloo pontifically when Alex had repeated it, "the Law of the Jungle specifically states: 'And remember the night is for hunting, and forget not the day is for sleep.' Now

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that you remind me—thou remindest me, it is broad daylight and all the wolves ought to be in their lairs."

It took a little while to calm down the Hokas, but then they trotted obediently off into the forest. Tanni was a bit disconcerted to note that Baloo and Bagheera were still present. She racked her brains for something in the *Jungle Books* specifically dealing with the obligation of bears and black panthers also to go off and sleep in the daytime. Nothing, however, came to mind. And Heragli refused to climb down while—

Inspiration came. She turned to the last Hokas. "Aren't you thirsty?" she asked.

"What says thy mother, Little Frog?" demanded Bagheera, washing his nose with his hand and trying to purr.

"She asked if thou and Baloo were not thirsty," said Alex.

"Thirsty?" The two Hokas looked at each other. The extreme suggestibility of their race came into play. Two tongues reached out and licked two muzzles.

"Indeed, the Rains have been scant this year," agreed Bagheera.

"Perhaps I had better go shake the *mohwa* tree and check the petals that fall down," said Baloo.

"I hear," said the girl slyly, "that Hathi proclaimed the Water Truce last night."

"Oh . . . *ah?*" said Bagheera.

"And you know that according to the Law of the Jungle, that means all the animals must drink peaceably together," went on Tanni. "Tell them, Alex."

"Quite true," nodded Baloo sagely when the boy had translated. "Macmillan edition, 1933, page 68."

"So," said Tanni, springing her trap, "you'll have to take Shere Khan off and let him drink with you."

"Wuh!" said Baloo, sitting down on his haunches to consider the situation. "It is the Law," he decided at length.

"You can come down now," called Tanni to Heragli. "They won't hurt you."

"Blood and bones!" grumbled the Rowra, but descended and looked at the Hokas with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm. "Har d'ja do."

"Hello, Lame Thief," said Bagheera amiably.

"Lame Thief? Why—" Heragli began to roar, and Bagheera tried manfully to arch his back, which is not easy for a barrel-shaped Hoka.

"General! General!" interrupted Echpo. "It's the only way. Go off and have a drink with them, and as soon as you can, meet us here again."

"Oh, very well. Blank dash flaming etcetera." Heragli trotted off into the brush, accompanied by his foes. Their voices trailed back:

"Hast hunted recently, Striped Killer?"

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"Eh? What? Hunted? Well, as a matter of fact, in England on Earth last month—the Goodwood—Master of the Hunt told me—went to earth at—"

The jungle swallowed them up.

"And now, dear lady," said Echpo nervously, "I must presume still further upon your patience. Poor Seesis has been left unguarded all this time—"

"Oh, yes!" The girl's long slim legs broke into a trot, back toward the place where she had first met the herpetoid. Echpo lumbered beside her and Alex followed.

"Ah . . . it is a difficult situation," declared the Chakban. "I fear the concussion has made my valued friend Seesis, ah, distrust the General and myself. His closest comrades! Can you imagine? He has, I think, some strange delusion that we mean to harm him."

Tanni slowed down. She felt no great eagerness to confront a paranoid python.

"He won't get violent," reassured Echpo. "I just wanted to warn you to discount anything he may do. He might, for example, try to write messages . . . Ah, here we are!"

They looked around the trampled vegetation. "He must have slipped away," said Tanni. "But he can't have gone far."

"Oh, he can move rapidly when he chooses, gracious madam," said Echpo, rubbing his hands in an agitated fashion. "Normally, of course, he does not so choose. You see, his race places an almost fanatical emphasis on self-restraint. Dignity, honor, and the like . . . those are the important things. A code, dear lady, which"—Echpo's deep-set eyes took on an odd gleam—"renders them vulnerable to, er, manipulation by those alert enough to press the proper semantic keys. But one which also renders them quite unpredictable. We had better find him at once."

It was not a large area in which they stood, and it soon became apparent that they had not simply overlooked the presence of ten meters of snake-like alien. A shout from Alex brought them to a trail crushed into the soft green herbage, as if someone had dragged a barrel through it. "This," said the boy, "must be the road of Kaa."

"Excellent spotting, young man," said Echpo. "Let us follow it."

They went rapidly along the track for several minutes. Tanni brushed the tangled golden hair from her eyes and wished for a comb, breakfast, a hot bath and—She noticed that the trail suddenly bent northward and continued in a straight line, as if Kaa—Seesis, blast it!—had realized where he was and set off toward some definite goal.

Echpo stopped, frowning, his flat nostrils a-twitch. "Dear me," he murmured, "this is *most* distressing."

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"Why—he's headed toward your ship, hasn't he?" asked Tanni. "He should be easy to find. Let's go!"

"Oh, no, no, no!" The Chakban shook his bat-eared head. "I wouldn't dream of letting you and your son—delightful boy, madam!—go any further. It is much too dangerous."

"Nonsense! There's nothing harmful here, and you said yourself he isn't violent."

"Please! Not another word!" The long hands waved her back. "No, dear lady, just return to the meeting place, if you will, and when Heragli gets there send him on to the ship. Meanwhile I will follow poor Seesis and, ah, do what I can."

Before Tanni could reply, Echpo had bounded off and the tall grasses hid him.

She stood for a moment, frowning. The Chakban was a curious and contradictory personality. Though his manners were impeccable, she had not felt herself warming to him. There was something, something almost . . . well, *Bandar-loggish* about him. *Ridiculous!* she told herself. *But why did he suddenly change his mind about having me along? Just because Seesis headed back toward the wrecked ship?*

"Shucks, Mom," pouted Alex, "everybody's gone. All the wolves are in bed—in their lairs, I mean, and Bagheera and Baloo gone off with Shere Khan, and the Bandar's gone to the Cold Lairs and we can't even watch Kaa fight him. Nobody lets me have any fun."

Decision came to Tanni. The demented Seesis might, after all, turn on Echpo. If she had any chance of preventing such a catastrophe, her duty was clear. In plain language, she felt an infernal curiosity. "Come along, Alex," she said.

They had not far to go. Breaking through a tall screen of pseudo-bamboo, they looked out on a meadow.

And in the center of that meadow rested a small, luxurious Starflash space rambler.

"Wait here, Alex," ordered Tanni. "If there seems to be any danger, run for help."

She crossed the ground to the open airlock. Strange, the ship was not even dented. Peering in, she saw the control room. No sign of Echpo or Seesis—maybe they were somewhere aft. She entered.

It struck her that the controls were in very good shape for a vessel that had landed hard enough to knock out its communication gear. On impulse, she went over to the visio and punched its buttons. The screen lit up . . . why, it was perfectly useable! She would call Mixumaxu and have a detachment of Hoka police flown here. The Private Eyes and Honest Cops could easily—

A thick, hairy arm shot past her and a long finger snapped the set

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off. Another arm like a great furry shackle pinned her into the chair she had taken.

"That," whispered Echpo, "was a mistake, dear lady."

For a second, instinctively and furiously, Tanni tried to break loose. A kitten might as well have tried to escape a gorilla. Echpo let her have it out while he closed the airlock by remote control. Then he eased his grip. She bounced from the chair. A hard hand grabbed her wrist and whirled her about.

"What is this?" she raged. "Let me *go!*" She kicked at Echpo's ankles. He slapped her so her head rang. Sobbing, she relaxed enough to stare at him through a blur of horror.

"I am afraid, dear Mrs. Jones, that you have penetrated our little deception," said the Chakban gently. "I had hoped we could abandon our ship here, since a description of it has unfortunately been broadcast on the subvisio. By posing as castaways, we could have used the transportation to Gelkar which you so graciously offered us, and hired another vessel there. But as it is—" He shrugged. "It seems best we stay with this one after all, using you, madam, as a hostage . . . much though it pains me, of course."

"You wouldn't dare!" gasped Tanni, unable to think of a more telling remark.

"Dare? Dear lady," said Echpo, smiling, "our poor friend Seesis is the Tertiary Receptacle of Wisdom of Sanussi. If we dared kidnap him, surely—Please hold still. It would deeply grieve me to have to bind you."

"Sanussi . . . I don't believe you," breathed the girl. "Why, you're unarmed and he must have twice your strength."

"Dear charmer," sighed Echpo, "how little you know of Sanussians. Their ethical code is *so* unreasonably strict. When Heragli and I entered Seesis' embassy office on Earth, all we had to do was threaten to fill an ancestral seltzer bottle we had previously . . . ah . . . borrowed, with soda pop. The dishonor would have compelled the next hundred generations of his family to spend an hour a day in ceremonial writhing and give up all public positions. We wrung his parole from him: he was not to speak to anyone or resist us with force until released."

"Not *speak* . . . oh, so that's why he was trying to write," said Tanni. A degree of steadiness was returning to her. She could not really believe this mincing dandy capable of harm. "And I suppose he slipped back here with some idea of calling our officials and showing them a written account of—"

"How quickly you grasp the facts, madam," bowed Echpo. "Naturally, I trailed him and, since he may not use his strength on me,

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dragged him into a stateroom aft and coiled him up. As long as Heragli and I abide by the Sanussian code—chiefly, to refrain from endangering others—he is bound by his promise. That is why we have no weapons; the General is so impulsive."

"But why have you kidnaped him?"

"Politics. A matter of pressure to get certain concessions from his planet. Don't trouble your pretty head about it, my lady. As soon as practical after we have reached our destination—surely not more than a year—you will be released with our heartfelt thanks for your invaluable assistance."

"But you don't need *me* for a hostage!" wailed Tanni. "You've got Seesis himself."

"Tut-tut. The Sanussian police are hot on our trail. Despite the size of interstellar space, they may quite possibly detect us and close in . . . after which, to wipe out the stain on *their* honor, they would cheerfully blow Seesis up with Heragli and myself. But their ethics will not permit them to harm an innocent bystander like you, so—" Echpo backed toward the airlock, half dragging the girl. His bulk filled the chamber, blocking off escape, as he opened the valves. "So, as soon as Heragli returns—and not finding me at the agreed rendezvous, he will surely come here—we depart."

His simian face broke into a grin as discordant noises floated nearer. "Why, here he is now. Heragli, dear friend, do hurry. We must leave this delightful planet immediately."

His voice carried to the Rowra, who had just emerged from the canebrake with Bagheera on one side and Baloo on the other. Staggering, Heragli sat down, licked one oversized paw, and began to wash his face. Peering past Echpo, Tanni saw that the General's swiping motions were rather unsteady.

"Heragli!" said the Chakban on a sharper note. "Pay attention!"

"Go sputz yourself," boomed the Rowra, and broke into song. "Oh, when I was twenty-one, when I was twenty-one, I never had lots of mvrouwing but I always had lots of fun. My basket days were over and my prowling days begun, on the very very rrnowing night when I was twenty-one—*Chorus!*" he roared, beating time with a wavering paw, and the two Hokas embraced him and chimed in: *"When we wash twenty-one—"*

"Heragli!" yelled Echpo. "What's wrong with you?"

Tanni could have told him. She realized suddenly, as she stood there with the Chakban's heavy grip on her wrist, that when she evoked thirst in Baloo and Bagheera, she had pointed them in one inevitable direction: the abandoned camp of the Black Tyrone. The phrase "take Shere Khan off

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and let him drink with you" could have only one meaning to a Hoka. Heragli, like many beings before him, had encountered the fiery Tokan liquor.

There are bigger, stronger, wiser races than the Hokas, but the Galaxy knows none with more capacity. Heragli was twice the size and eight times the weight of a Hoka, but his companions were just pleasantly high, while he was —no other word will do—potted. And Tanni was willing to bet that Baloo and Bagheera were each two bottles ahead of him.

The General rolled over on his back and waved his feet in the air. "Oh, that little ball of yarn—" he warbled.

"Heragli!" shrieked Echpo.

"Oh, those wild, wild kittens, those wild, wild kittens, they're making a wildcat of me!"

"*General!*"

"Old tomcats never die, they just fa-a-a-a-ade—huh? Whuzza matta wi' you, monkey?" demanded Heragli, still on his back, looking at the spaceship upside down from bloodshot eyes. "Stannin' onna head. Riddickerluss, ab-so-lutely . . . Oh, curse the city that stole muh Kitty, by dawn she'll—Le's havva nuther one, mnowrr, 'fore you leave me! Hell an' damnation," said Heragli, suddenly dropping from the peak of joyous camaraderie to the valley of bitter suspicion, "dirty work inna catagon. Passed over f' promotion, twishe. Classmate, too . . . Is this a ray gun that I see b'fore me, the handle toward muh hand? Come, lemme clutch thee. . . . Monkeys an' snakes. Gallopin' horrors, I call 'em. Never trus' a primate—" and he faded off into mutterings.

"General!" called Echpo, sternly. "Pull yourself together and come aboard. We're leaving."

"Huh? Awri', awri', awri'—" said Heragli in a bleared tone. He lurched to all four feet, focused with some effort on the ship, and wobbled in its general direction.

"Mom!" cried a boyish voice, and Alex broke into the meadow. "What's going on?" He spotted Tanni with Echpo's hand clutching her. "What're you doing to my mother?"

"Heragli!" yelped Echpo. "Stop that brat!"

The Rowra blinked. Whether he would have obeyed if he had been sober, or if he had not been brooding about other races and the general unfairness of life, is an open question. He was not a bad felinocentauroid at heart. But as it was, he saw Alex running toward the ship, growled the one word "*Primate!*" to himself, and crouched for a leap.

His first mistake had been getting drunk. His second was to ignore, or be unaware of, three facts. These were, in order:

1) A Hoka, though not warlike, enjoys a roughhouse.

2) A Hoka's tubby appearance

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is most deceptive; he is, for instance, more than a match for any human.

3) Baloo and Bagheera did not think Shere Khan should be allowed to harm the Man-Cub.

Heragli leaped. Baloo met him in mid-air, head to head. There was a loud, hollow *thonk*, and Heragli fell into a sitting position with a dazed look on his face while Baloo did a reeling sort of off-to-Buffalo. At that moment, Bagheera entered the wars. He would have been more effective had he not religiously adhered to the principle of fighting like a black panther, scrambling onto the Rowra's back, scratching and biting.

"Ouch!" howled Heragli, regaining full consciousness. "What the sputz? Get the snrrowl off me! Leggo, you illegitimate forsaken object of an origin which the compilers of Leviticus would not have approved! Wrowrrl!" And he made frantic efforts to reach over his shoulder.

"Striped Killer!" squeaked Bagheera joyously. "Hunter of helpless frogs! Lame Thief of the Waingunga! Take that! And that!"

"What're you talking about? Never ate a frog in m' life. Unhand me—gug!" Bagheera had wrapped both sturdy arms around Heragli's neck and started throttling him.

At the same time Baloo recovered sufficiently to stage a frontal attack. Fortunately, being in the role of a bear, he could fight like a bear, which is to say, very much like a Hoka. Accordingly, he landed a stiff one-two on Heragli's nose and then, as the Rowra reared up, wheezing, he fell into a clinch that made his enemy's ribs creak. Breaking cleanly, he landed a couple of hard punches in the midriff of Heragli's torso, chopped him over the heart, sank his teeth into the right foreleg, was lifted off his feet by an anguished jerk, used the opportunity to deliver a double kick to the chin while flurrying a series of blows, and generally made himself useful.

"Run, Alex!" cried Tanni.

The boy paused, uncertain, as Rowra and Hokas tore up the sod a meter from him.

"Run! Do what Mother tells you! Get help!"

Reluctantly, Alex turned and sped for the woods. Tanni felt Echpo's grasp shift as he moved behind her. When he pulled a Holman raythrower from beneath his tunic, the blood seemed to drain out of her heart.

"Believe me, dear lady, I deplore this," said the Chakban. "I had hoped to keep my weapon unknown and untouched. But we cannot risk your son's warning the authorities too soon, can we? And then there are those Hokas." He pinned her against the wall and sighted on Alex. "You *do* understand my position, don't you?" he asked anxiously.

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Struggling and screaming, Tanni clawed for his eyes. The brow ridges defeated her. She saw the gun muzzle steady—

—and there was a shock that threw her from Echpo's grip and out onto the ground.

Dazed, she scrambled to her feet with a wild notion of throwing herself in the path of the beam . . . But where *was* Echpo?

The airlock seemed to hold nothing but coil upon coil of Seesis. Only gradually, as her vision cleared, did Tanni make out a contorted face among those cable-thick bights. The Chakban was scarcely able to breathe, let alone move.

"Sssssso!" Seesis adjusted his pince-nez and regarded his prisoner censoriously. "So you lied to me. You were prepared to commit violence after all. I am shocked and grieved. I thought you shared my abhorrence of bloodshed. I see that you must be gently but firmly educated until you understand the error of your ways and repent and enter the gentle brotherhood of beings. Lie still, now, or I will break your back."

"I—" gasped Echpo. "I . . . had . . . my . . . duty—"

"And I," answered Seesis, swaying above him, "have my honor."

Alex fell into his mother's arms. She was not too full of thanksgiving to pick up the fallen gun. Across the meadow, Baloo and Bagheera stood triumphant over a semi-conscious Heragli and beamed at their snaky ally.

The Cold Lairs were taken. The Man-Cub had been rescued from Bandar-log and Lame Thief. Kaa's Hunting was finished.

☆ ☆ ☆

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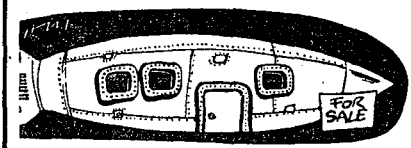

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The Big Trek

by FRITZ LEIBER

I DIDN'T KNOW IF I'D GOT TO THIS crazy place by rocket, space dodger, time twister—or maybe even on foot the way I felt so beat. My memory was gone. When I woke up there was just the desert all around me with the gray sky pressing down like the ceiling of an enormous room. The desert . . . and the big trek. And *that* was enough to make me stop grabbing for my memory and take a quick look at my pants to make sure I was human.

These, well, animals were shuffling along about four abreast in a straggly line that led from one end of nowhere to the other, right past my rocky hole. Wherever they were heading they seemed to have come from everywhere and maybe everywhen. There were big ones and little ones, some like children and some just small. A few went on two feet, but more on six or eight, and there were wrigglers, rollers, oozers, flutterers and hoppers; I couldn't decide whether the low-flying ones were pets or pals. Some had scales, others feathers, bright armor like beetles or fancy hides like zebras, and quite a few wore transparent suits holding air or other gases, or water or other liquids, though some of the suits were tailored for a dozen tentacles and some for no legs at all. And darn if their shuffle—to pick one word for all the kinds of movement—wasn't more like a dance than a lockstep.

They were too different from

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each other for an army, yet they weren't like refugees either, for refugees wouldn't dance and make music, even if on more feet than two or four and with voices and instruments so strange I couldn't tell which was which. Their higgledy-piggledy variety suggested a stampede from some awful disaster or a flight to some ark of survival, but I couldn't feel panic in them—or solemn purpose either, for that matter. They just shuffled happily along. And if they were a circus parade, as a person might think from their being animals and some of them dressed fancy, then who was bossing the show and where were the guards or the audience, except for me?

I should have been afraid of such a horde of monsters, but I wasn't, so I got up from behind the rock I'd been spying over and I took one last look around for footprints or blast-scar or time-twister whorls or some sign of how I'd got there, and then I shrugged my shoulders and walked down toward them.

They didn't stop and they didn't run, they didn't shoot and they didn't shout, they didn't come out to capture or escort me, they kept on shuffling along without a break in the rhythm, but a thousand calm eyes were turned on me from the tops of weaving stalks or the depths of bony caverns, and as I got close a dusky roller like an escaped tire with green eyes in the unspinning hub speeded up a little and an opal octopus in a neat suit brimful of water held back, making room for me.

Next thing I knew I was restfully shuffling along myself, wondering how the roller kept from tipping and why the octopus moved his legs by threes, and how so many different ways of moving could be harmonized like instruments in a band. Around me was the murmuring rise and fall of languages I couldn't understand and the rainbow-changing of color patches that might be languages for the eye—the octopus dressed in water looked from time to time like a shaken-up pousse-café.

I tried out on them what I seemed to remember as the lingoes of a dozen planets, but nobody said anything back at me directly—I almost tried Earth-talk on them, but something stopped me. A puffy bird-thing floating along under a gas-bag that was part of its body settled lightly on my shoulder and hummed gently in my ear and dropped some suspicious-looking black marbles and then bobbed off. A thing on two legs from somewhere ahead in the trek waltzed its way to my side and offered me a broken-edged chunk that was milky with light and crusty. The thing looked female, being jauntily built and having a crest of violet feathers, but instead of nose and mouth her face tapered to a rosy little ring

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and where breasts would be there was a burst of pink petals. I gave my non-Earth lingoes another try. She waited until I was quiet and then she lifted the crusty chunk to her rosy ring, which she opened a little, and then she offered the chunk to me again. I took it and tasted it and it was like brick cheese but flaky and I ate it. I nodded and grinned and she puffed out her petals and traced a circle with her head and turned to go. I almost said, "Thanks, chick," because that seemed the right thing, but again something stopped me.

So the big trek had accepted me, I decided, but as the day wore on (if they had days here, I reminded myself) the feeling of acceptance didn't give me any real security. It didn't satisfy me that I had been given eats instead of being eaten and that I was part of a harmony instead of a discord. I guess I was expecting too much. Or maybe I was finding a strange part of myself and was frightened of it. And after all it isn't reassuring to shuffle along with intelligent animals you can't talk to, even if they act friendly and dance and sing and now and then thrum strange strings. It didn't calm me to feel that I was someplace that was homey and at the same time as lonely as the stars. The monsters around me got to seem stranger and stranger, I quit seeing their little tricks of personality and saw only their outsides. I craned my neck trying to spot the chick with the pink petals but she was gone. After a while I couldn't bear it any longer. Some ruins looking like chopped-off skyscrapers had come in sight earlier and we were just now passing them, not too close, so although the flat sky was getting darker and pressing down lower and although there were distant flashes of lightning and rumbles of thunder (I think that's what they were) I turned at a right angle and walked away fast from the trek.

Nobody stopped me and pretty soon I was hidden in the ruins. They were comforting at first, the little ruins, and I got the feeling my ancestors had built them. But then I came to the bigger ones and they *were* chopped-off skyscrapers and yet some of them were so tall they scratched the dark flat sky and for a moment I thought I heard a distant squeal like chalk on a giant blackboard that set my teeth on edge. And then I got to wondering what had chopped off the skyscrapers and what had happened to the people, and after that I began to see dark things loafing along after me close to the ruined walls. They were about as big as I was, but going on all fours. They began to follow me closer and closer, moving like clumsy wolves, the more notice I took of them. I saw that their faces were covered with hair like their bodies

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and that their jaws were working. I started to hurry and as soon as I did I began to hear the sounds they were making. The bad thing was that although the sounds were halfway between growls and barks, I could understand them.

"Hello, Joe."

"Whacha know, Joe?"

"That so, Joe?"

"Let's blow, Joe."

"C'mon Joe, let's go, go, go!"

And then I realized the big mistake I'd made in coming to these ruins, and I turned around and started to run back the way I had come, and they came loping and lurching after me, trying to drag me down, and the worst thing was that I knew they didn't want to kill me, but just have me get down on all fours and run with them and bark and growl.

The ruins grew smaller, but it was very dark now and at first I was afraid that I had lost my way and next I was afraid that the end of the big trek had passed me by, but then the light brightened under the low sky like the afterglow of a sunset and it showed me the big trek in the distance and I ran toward it and the hairy things stopped skulking behind me.

I didn't hit the same section of the big trek, of course, but one that was enough like it to make me wonder. There was another dusky roller, but with blue eyes and smaller, so that it had to spin faster, and another many-legged creature dressed in water, and a jaunty chick with crimson crest and a burst of orange petals. But the difference didn't bother me.

The trek slowed down, the change in rhythm rippling back to me along the line. I looked ahead and there was a large round hole in the low sky and through it I could see the stars. And through it too the trek itself was swerving, each creature diving upward toward the winking points of light in the blackness.

I kept on shuffling happily forward, though more slowly now, and to either side of the trek I saw heaped on the desert floor spacesuits tailored to fit every shape of creature I could imagine and fly him or her safely through the emptiness above. After a while it got to be my turn and I found a suit and climbed into it and zipped it snug and located the control buttons in the palms of the gloves and looked up. Then I felt more than control buttons in my fingers and I looked to either side of me and I was hand in hand with an octopus wearing an eight-legged spacesuit over his water-filled one and on the other side with a suited-up chick who sported a jet-black crest and pearl-gray petals.

She traced a circle with her head and I did the same, and the octopus traced a smaller circle with a free tentacle, and I knew that one of the reasons I hadn't used Earth-talk was that I was going

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to keep quiet until I learned or remembered *their* languages, and that another reason was that the hairy four-footers back in the ruins had been men like me and I hated them but these creatures beside me were my kind, and that we had come to take one last look at the Earth that had destroyed itself and at the men who had stayed on Earth and not got away like me—to come back and lose my memory from the shock of being on my degraded ancestral planet.

Then we clasped hands tight, which pushed the buttons in our palms. Our jets blossomed out behind us and we were diving up together out of this world through the smoothly rounded doughnut hole toward the stars. I realized that space wasn't empty and that those points of light in the blackness weren't lonely at all.

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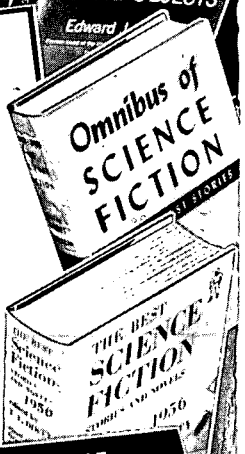

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